An existential phenomenological exploration of the lived experience of freedom in former political prisoners of the Romanian Communist Gulag

Counselling Psychology Doctoral Thesis

OANA BARNETT
Middlesex ID: M00433957

Primary Supervisor: Prof. Emmy Van Deurzen
Secondary Supervisor: Dr. Neil Lamont

Abstract

There is an absence of literature on the experience of former political prisoners of the Romanian Communist Gulag and their experience of freedom/oppression. Most research on individuals subjected to physical or/and psychological torture for political reasons has focused on the traumatic experiences of this client group and their sequelae approximating the diagnostic criteria of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It was the purpose of this research to reflect on the gaps in the literature and highlight the potential importance of turning towards an experiential and phenomenological understanding of freedom for this particular subgroup.

This was an idiographic investigation capturing the first-hand experiential accounts of six former political prisoners of the Romanian Communist Gulag. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit the participants' understanding of freedom before, during and after incarceration and the resources that they drew upon in the face of overwhelmingly distressing life circumstances, such as those of political torture. The data was analysed using Critical Narrative Analysis (Langdridge, 2007), a method which facilitates a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry into the unique individual experiences as well as commonalities amongst participants. The inclusion of a critical moment allowed an exploration of the interplay of personal narratives and the frameworks of dominant narratives and canonical cultural discourses. The participants conceptualised their freedom in close relation to taking action, understood as active political engagement – not so much as an abstract quality or trait; their actions were guided by the compass of their own values and beliefs, which facilitated a positive appraisal of adversity; the noetic dimension of freedom was prominent, articulated as psycho-spiritual autonomy and congruence with the 'voice within', which was inseparable form a transcendental orientation towards meaning and didn't alter with the passing of time. Narrators described the collective power of being with others and their spirituality as central to their coping. Findings also highlighted the significance of disgruntlement with the present political context in Romania and the government's failure to purge Communism from key power structures and collective mentalities. Canonical cultural narratives of freedom were also discussed with reference to narrators' stories. The implications of the project's findings for counselling psychology theory and practice were explored**.**

Key words: *Communism; Romanian Gulag; existential therapy; counselling psychology; freedom; oppression; political prisoners; torture; social justice*

Table of Contents

1.   Introduction

1.1.   Overview

Finding meaning and purpose in life has been an integral part of my personal journey. My personal background is that I was born and brought up in Romania under the Communist regime until the 1989 Revolution, when I was 12 years of age. My parents had also been born and brought up in this climate of terror aimed at domesticating people and inhibiting any freedom of thought or spark of individuality that was not congruent with the Communist philosophy at the time.

My grandfather, a liberal peasant who spoke up against collectivism, was imprisoned for two and a half years in one of the 240 labour camps (islands of punishment) that the Communists built modelling the Soviet carceral infrastructure with the clear aim to exterminate social/political opposition and build a 'pure' Communist society. Whilst imprisoned, he was subjected to a wide array of punitive methods that included systematic beating, starvation, torture, and abject humiliations - to name just a few. His story, as well as the detention writings that emerged with the memorialist literature after 1989, expressed a collective trauma that was experienced by a community of victims, mainly philosophers, psychologists, priests, students - people who dared speak up for their rights and the rights of others.

Having had childhood experiences of living in a carceral society and being deprived of many liberties, I now want to take the opportunity to try to understand how therapy can work with issues related to freedom restriction and its different facets and hopefully contribute to knowledge and the existing literature in the field.

An awareness of the concept of freedom and the recognition and acceptance of individual responsibility plays a pivotal role in both theory and practice of psychotherapy (May, 1981). My practitioner work has taught me that most psychotherapy clients are grappling with some aspect of their freedom: some look for freedom from compulsions or anxieties, freedom from others' behaviours or thoughts, freedom to be themselves, freedom from past traumas or inner enslavement, which helped me realize that human freedom and choice are crucial underpinnings of psychotherapy and constitute a key ingredient for change. To some degree, the psychotherapeutic endeavour is always about extending our clients' understanding of their freedom and increasing their sense of control over it.

As a trainee counselling psychologist and existential practitioner, I believe that one of my main aims is to help people become free, to be aware and experience their possibilities. The purpose of virtually all counselling endeavours, at some level and to some degree, is to set people free – whether we refer to individual, group, family, community, or culture.

I also think that the investigation of former prisoners' narratives is significant because it includes oral testimonies of lived experience, constituting a fresh point of departure in understanding the phenomenon of freedom-restriction, and also because it brings to the fore critical issues related to human rights, governance, and politics in Romania that would be of interest to scholars in a range of disciplines in the Humanities and beyond. It is increasingly likely that psychologists and psychotherapists may be faced with clients who have been tortured, although the significance of this background can be easily unrecognized or mishandled. With the growing incidence of political refugees to Europe escaping from organized violence, human rights violations, and torture in many parts of the world, the high demand for psychological support in the recovery from trauma and oppression is well documented (Gorman,2001).

However, I find that it is a topic that has been significantly under researched, despite its explicit or implicit prevalence in the counselling profession. This might have to do with the quicksilver quality of 'freedom', its paradoxical nature as a concept and the difficulties arising from trying to capture its richness and depth through operational working definitions. Whist freedom has always been an essential underlying goal of counselling and psychotherapy, its conceptual depth and complexity and the profound layers of meaning intrinsic to it, as well as the wide interdisciplinary range might explain its lack of prominence in psychological research. Within the field of CoP, there have recently been more calls to return to philosophical reflection in order to capture and contain psychological concepts that form the basis of the profession (Van Deurzen, 2010; Cooper, 2011; Hanna, 2011)

Across the ages and many cultures of the world, freedom has been considered so essential and precious to humanity, that many millions of human beings have willingly sacrificed their lives for it. In order for it to be the object of such devotion, one can fairly assume that freedom must have a deep relation to the very core and meaning of being human. It is the recognition of the richness of human freedom and the incredible resilience that it conjures up that has spirited this research.

The topic has been approached from many different perspectives. Existential philosophy and psychotherapy views freedom as an indelible ontological given, which is closely interwoven with the idea of responsibility and choice (May, 1981). We are 'condemned to be free' (Sartre, 1946, p. 43) and bear the full weight of our freedom and we alone are responsible for how we live. However, as thoroughly as existential philosophers have debated the concept of freedom, they haven't always explored its different facets across particular groups of people and within their specific historical, cultural and geo-political situatedness. What's more, the principle of existentialist philosophy according to which freedom is absolute despite our facticity and the painful realities of the world leave little room to conceptualize political oppression within its framework (Grether, 1974).

As stated earlier, my personal experience led me to believe that an experiential and phenomenological understanding of freedom under totalitarianism is both pertinent and indeed necessary to highlight; therefore, I approached this research with the awareness that I already held certain biases in relation to this topic. As someone who had experienced the Communist Regime directly and who heard first-hand family narratives about my grandad's imprisonment and the tortures and re-education programs those political prisoners were subjected to, I am aware of entering this study as an 'insider' with a number of assumptions on the similarities between his experience and the participants. Since all research involves a reciprocity in which there is a 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer,1989) of participant and researcher, it is fundamentally important for me to be aware of these and reflexively engage with them throughout the research. It is my intention to convey this engagement throughout this dissertation.

Andrews (2007) posits that '*personal narratives reveal not only much about the narrating self but provide a small window into the engines of history and historical change, as we both shape and are shaped by the events of our day*' (2007, p.51). To stay close to the experiential accounts of my participants whilst attending to my own potential interfering narratives and biases and making them explicit, I will continue by sharing my own story with the reader and provide an overview of the historical and geo- political context of my research in the sections below.

1.2. Romania under Communist Dictatorship

During the second half of the 20th century, the political events in the countries of Europe took a dramatic pace. As World War II ended, the Red Army entered Eastern Europe and occupied

its countries, including Romania, imposing the communist system patterned on the Soviet model. In 1945, after mass protests by communist supporters a new pro-Soviet government was installed in Romania. Gradually, the growing Communist Party gained control of the political scene and pre-war political leaders were steadily eliminated, culminating with the forced abdication of King Michael of Romania in December 1947 and the replacement of the existing monarchy with the People's Republic of Romania.

Between 1947 and 1989, socialist Romania operated under Marxist -Leninist one-party Communist rule. From 1947 to 1965, the state was a Soviet-aligned Eastern Bloc state with very distinctive features. This period constituted the peak of terror since the government in power initiated merciless repression campaigns, eliminating anyone who opposed Communist ideology or was a real or imaginary threat to the regime. The Secret Police arrested, detained, tortured, and murdered any opponents without a court order and didn't inform their family members about where their loved ones were taken. Modelling the Soviet Gulag system, numerous forced labour camps were set up all over the country becoming the graveyards for many political prisoners of the regime due to the physical abuse, food shortages, cold weather and increasingly higher working quotas. According to scholarly estimates, over 2 million people were incarcerated for political reasons in labour camps, prisons, or psychiatric facilities under the Communist Regime (Comisia Prezidenţială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste în Romania: 2006, *p. 160-161*).

In 1965, Nicolae Ceausescu became General Secretary of the Communist Party and further extended his power by becoming president of the state in 1974. He gained a surge of popularity in the West due to refusing to participate in the invasion of Czechoslovakia, unlike the other member countries of the Warsaw pact. However, his pursue of a strict orthodox Socialist policy in which no internal opposition was allowed, coupled with this megalomaniac taste in architecture gave way to inhumane austerity and brutal political repression, which eventually led the fall of his totalitarian government and his execution by fire squad in December 1989.

1.3. My Story

I was born in 1977 in Constanta, a city on the Black Sea Coast in Communist Romania and grew up under the despotic totalitarian regime of Nicolae Ceausescu. My mother was an intellectual, an attribute that did not sit well with the Marxist ideas of 'class struggle' and their

gratification of the Proletariat. Coming from a rich peasant family in rural Transylvania, she represented what the Communist Party described as the 'class enemy'. What made it worse was that her father had been imprisoned in one of Ceausescu's infamous labour camps, an event that left an indelible mark on our whole family, as we were continually monitored and suspected for harbouring anti-government feelings. My father was an operator in the Black Sea Port and had a more favourable background within that political context. Although he came from a middle-class family, his mother was half Russian – which was considered a great advantage when the country was at the peak of its russification process. The mere fact that she could speak Russian would make the Secret Police officer's face beam, despite her secret hatred for Socialism and arduous admiration for King Michael of Romania and the 'old days' of the interwar period.

I was one of Ceausescu's last generations of Communism-raised children in the Golden Age[1] of the Socialist Republic of Romania. In grade 1, I proudly received my Red Scarf and became a Pioneer. This was a crucial moment in the life of any pupil, as we would swear allegiance to the Party in an exceedingly long and laboured ceremony that we prepared for, for weeks in advance. We would recite poems and sing songs about our 'Great Father', Nicolae Ceausescu, to an audience made up of tired parents and teachers, looking petrified and monitoring their every move – terrified something went wrong in front of the Party Assembly and they could be interrogated and/or worse, thrown in prison.

To anyone who has not experienced life under a totalitarian regime, this might seem a gross exaggeration but to us it was a reality. People disappeared all the time and it was implicit yet certain that they either ended-up in prison or were taken to the labour camps. Some tried to flee across the border to Hungary or swim across the Danube, which I always chose to believe when it involved my own loved ones. However, that thought filled me with fear too, since I knew that if they had got caught, they would have been executed.

Reflecting back to my school years, political propaganda is the first thing that comes to mind. It was inescapable. I remember that each morning we had to solemnly stand-up in front of Ceausescu's portrait, which was hanging in the room of every institution, and chant the national anthem whilst frozen in a salute pose. The entire school curriculum was littered with poems about our Great Leader or texts about the glory of the working class and the role of the

---

[1] 'The Golden Age' is the name that the official propaganda of the time attributed to the historical period in which the Socialist Republic of Romania was ruled by Nicolae Ceausescu (1965-1989). The expression emerged and was used predominantly in the 80s, a time which was dominated by Ceausescu's personality cult. As such, another term used by the official press to refer to this period is the 'Nicolae Ceausescu Age'.

Communist Youth in carrying the red flag and the socialist flame into the future. His personality cult was omnipresent.

Every now and then, the school took us on public marches in which we carried slogans that praised the Communist Party, or they organized large-scale entertainment shows to celebrate the birthday of our Great Father. My mum always made sure that our uniforms were immaculate, and we were taken to stadiums where we had to perform intricate choreographies that resulted in writing Ceausescu's name with our underweight bodies, by waving coloured scarves up in the air so he could see it from a helicopter. I remember fainting on two occasions, to the embarrassment of my school and the Communist Youth Committee.

School was exceptionally regimented, very much mirroring the military. We all had uniforms and ranks and reported to our superiors, who were chosen from the same class or school year, depending on their responsibilities. I was made Group Commander in year 5 and had to proudly display a red cord with corresponding shoulder marks. I reported into the Detachment Commander who wore a yellow cord, but I never got promoted due to an indelible event on my student file.

In the second grade I was stripped of my Pioneer insignia because I drew horns and a moustache on Ceausescu's first page portrait in my Mathematics book. My parents were called by the principal and separately interrogated by the Securitate for hours. They were asked where I'd learnt to dishonour Our Great Father from and whether I was exposed to any 'unhealthy' anti-Regime ideas within the household. I do not know how my parents escaped punishment. All I remember is that at the end a general kneeled down in front of me and whispered that if that happened again, both my parents would be thrown in jail, and my brother and I would be sent to separate orphanages. I was petrified. I knew he meant it.

As I grew older, life became harder. I realized more and more that we had nothing to live on. Not just our family, but everyone we knew. Romania was collapsing under the weight of its mass foreign exports, an $11bn debt incurred as part of Ceausescu's attempts at civilizing its people from their bourgeois origins and accomplishing the Communist utopia. Two years before I was born and misled by Ceausescu's political distance from the Soviet Union, America had granted him the privilege of borrowing money at low interest rates, which he used to finance his vision of turning Bucharest into a magnificent capital city. This culminated with the building of The House of the Republic (rebranded as the People's House after 1989), the heaviest building in the world and the opulent symbol of Ceausescu's personality cult. That would serve

as both his home and his headquarters. Even now, whenever I catch a glimpse of this monstrous concrete edifice, I feel a knot in my stomach: it both saddens and angers me, a tragic reminder of Ceausescu's megalomania and what was accomplished through the blood and tears of an entire nation during his despotic regime.

To achieve his vision, the Old City's churches, historical monuments and over 30,000 residences were completely demolished. Over time, this extended to the entire capital and other cities and villages across the country, to make room for a landscape of grey blocks of flats, collective farms, and factories. With that came the perpetual ration queues for even the most basic of goods and the gradual deterioration of the human spirit.   To illustrate this with an anonymous quote, the plaque in front of Sighet prison, one of the most monstrous places where political prisoners were sent to die, says it best:

'*The greatest victory of communism was to create people without a memory—a brainwashed new man unable to remember what he was, what he had, or what he did before communism.*'

Indeed, when I think about myself and my family, we were abjectly reduced to a name on a yellow ration card that entitled us to one kilogram of flour and sugar per month and a litre of sunflower oil. Our bodies were weak, and our souls were atrophied. We could not have any personal wishes, any opinions, or thoughts of our own, any history or plans.

I remember the ritual of being woken up at 5am by my mother in order to go and stand in queue: there was always a long line awaiting and both my brother and I loathed it, but food was scarce, and the act of queuing soon became part of our modus vivendi. Sometimes the line used to stretch out of sight and there was never a guarantee there would be enough left by the time we got to the front. That never stopped my mother from dragging us along. We had to try.

We heard that those who worked for the Party, the State or the Securitate had access to chocolate, bananas, real coffee, and real meat, but we knew all too well that it was not for people like us. We did not even know what we were missing - I had my first banana when I was 13, under Capitalism. Some Port workers would be given oranges or bananas by the foreign crews and would risk severe punishments to bring this home to their families, tucked away under their shirts. To our disappointment, my father never did. 'What good would I be to you in prison?' he used to say. And he was right.

There was a lot of darkness in my childhood years, both metaphorically and literally. In his desire to clear Romania's increasing debt load, Ceausescu started cutting costs and exporting all of the country's rich resources. Electricity was one of them, and it went off at 7 pm every

day. I have vivid memories of gathering with my family in front of a gas-lit lamp. My brother and I did our homework or doodled, my dad read, and my mother repaired torn garments. We sat in silence – it was safest, my dad used to say.

During Communism, everybody was suspicious of each other – you never knew who was a Party Member, or a Securitate whisperer – so keeping silent was the most adaptive strategy there was. We were told of people calling secret phone lines and denouncing their neighbours, since the Party would reward such bravery generously with a move into a bigger flat or a better job position. This made me very wary of people, something that stayed with me for a long time.

All the blocks of flats from the Communist era had very thin walls, which meant that one was never alone. One day, my mother told us that the family living on the 2nd floor were imprisoned for listening to Free Europe on the radio. The Securitate, Romania's Secret Police, had picked them up in the night and we never saw them or their children again. It was also vital to remember not to be heard laughing, as there was always the danger of someone saying that we are telling jokes about the Party or Our Great Leader. So, I did not talk much.

I also vividly recall the cold winters. Alongside the rationing of electricity, there was no longer any central heating, which meant that in the winter we had to wear our coats and hats to bed. I used to feel so happy when my father filled empty bottles with boiled water and put them at my feet. However, he could only do that rarely since gas and water were also rationed. Another highlight in our cold and dark weeks was bath night, when we got hot water for a couple of hours at the weekend. However, as the youngest in the family my turn was last – and I always felt anxious that I would miss it – and with that, the feeling of warmth and cleanliness this event brought me. For a brief moment, it was as if all the pain, fear and misery of our daily existence got washed away.

Anxiety and fear were deep-seated within me. Being an inquisitive child, I always felt in the wrong. I could not ask why. I couldn't stand out of the crowd, and I had to keep my head down. If I obeyed and kept silent, my mother used to say, I would be able to be 'free', get married and even live in the two-bedroom flat we had after they died. After all, I did not want to end up in prison like my granddad! I remember that the 'freedom' that my mother talked about caused a lot of cognitive dissonance for my 10-year-old self. By then I realized that we were all trapped in a country-prison, but I had no clue what was on the other side.

Between 1949 and 1963, Romania went through the collectivization of agriculture, which brought with it the coercion to join collective farms, mandatory agricultural quotas, and the

arbitrary transfer of private land to the collectives. This also meant the prosecution and destruction of 'rich peasants'. My grandfather, who ran a prosperous farm, had been arrested for holding back a calf from the monthly counts so he could feed his family some meat at Christmas. He had buried the animal skin in the back garden and was later denounced by his neighbour, a loyal Communist Party member. My mother would often tell me about her family's tragedy, how she grew up without a father, her breath-taking terror and panic attacks each time the Securitate knocked at their door, and the sense of shame she had felt as her father's name was tarnished for opposing collectivism and being an 'enemy of the people'.

My granddad's sentence was 10 years in prison, but he was liberated under the general amnesty after he had served 3 years and a half. However, his persecution and pain didn't end there. He remained under surveillance, and so did his whole extended family, including us. One thing that always struck me about my granddad was his *joie de vivre* and his psychological resilience, despite all the atrocities that he witnessed. He took pride in his story, and he took all the little opportunities we had to talk to me about not only his incarceration, but what sustained him and others like him through the purgatory of physical and psychological torture? He felt free. Paradoxically, he said he'd never felt freer than when he found himself within the four prison walls.

In a country where freedom of press or speech were not allowed, where one couldn't travel abroad or receive a parcel from the West without risking execution, where you couldn't read literature that didn't have the Party's approval, where the efficient Secret Police agents could brutally murder you and your family for anything remotely anti-Communist, my grandfather felt free. He had found a route into freedom that seemed different from what I assumed it to be, and that intrigued me for a long time.

December 1989 was marked by a series of events that became known as the Romanian Revolution - which started with a handful of students protesting in Timisoara and spread like wildfire to the other cities of Romania. On 17 December Ceausescu ordered the Army and the Secret Police to open fire on anti-communist protestors which resulted in more than a thousand students being killed and the collapse of his despotic regime five days later. We were travelling to Transylvania for Christmas and when we got off at the train station in Bucharest, I can vividly remember the sound of gunshots and the dead bodies lying in the snow. Several days later, after watching the execution of the dictatorial on live TV with my whole family, I told myself that all that blood wasn't shed for nothing and that we finally became 'free'.

Indeed, the decades that followed the collapse of totalitarianism were marked by significant societal, cultural, and political changes: the press became free, newspapers flourished, and TV and radio stations boomed. Our cultural life wasn't strangled anymore. People were allowed to go to church and Religious Studies were reintroduced in schools. Certain academic disciplines, like philosophy and psychology were re-instituted in 1990, after 15 years of being outlawed. A return to Capitalism was supported by politicians and intellectuals alike and markets were formed and protected. However, it often seemed that just like me - other people were struggling to fully comprehend their 'freedom'. The liberation of economic initiatives and public realms opened the doors to economic freedom, but people were paralyzed by 50 years of obedience and fear. We had no idea of what our basic human rights were, or what 'individuality', 'autonomy' 'private space' or 'public space' meant. In many ways, I still felt trapped. I couldn't own my freedom as I lacked the tools to define it.

After I finished my postgraduate studies and got a job in education, I began feeling more and more disillusioned with the corruption that characterized post-communist Romania on all levels. The absence of an educated political class, the prevalence of nepotism and cronyism to the detriment of meritocracy and the utter lack of moral values determined me to leave the country behind and move to Italy. With hindsight, the act of emigrating was a way of claiming my freedom. I didn't feel that I could heal from the prolonged trauma that was inflicted upon me and us as a society, unless I had the geographical distance to engage in that process. It has been 18 years since I left my country, and I can finally say that I have found my freedom.

I have shared my experience and memories here and how I continue to try make sense of what happened, as it is these that have spirited this research. This project has been driven by a strong desire to gain a better grasp of how people understand their freedom and to hopefully generate knowledge of the resources that people draw upon in order to sustain or persevere in their search for personal freedom, even when they are faced with overwhelmingly distressing life circumstances such as those of political detention/torture.

In the following section I will first provide a review of the current relevant literature associated to my research topic. I then outline the research methodology used, in relation to the ontological and epistemological positioning of the study. Specifically, I will provide a rationale for why Critical Narrative Analysis was used and how it was adapted for the purpose of this research. I will then present my findings chapter and discuss these in a subsequent chapter. Last but not least, I will turn to the clinical significance and implications of this project for future research, as well as discussing its limitations.

2.   *Literature Review*

I started researching the current literature in the field to first ascertain whether there was any value in exploring this topic and whether such project would potentially enrich the existing knowledgebase in any significant way. Computerized literature search of MEDLINE, PUBMED, PsycINFO and EBSCO was performed using the keywords: *ex/ former political prisoners/detainees, survivor studies, freedom, oppression, lived experience, individual accounts, psychosocial, psychology and social, qualitative/quantitative studies/research, communism, Romania, labour camps, Gulag, imprisonment, incarceration.* Journal articles, books and book reviews published from database inception through to July 2016 were included in the literature review.

I included studies in which the population was women or men over 18 years old who had been subjected to political incarceration in a prison or other correctional facility environment (labour camp). I limited these to European studies in order to reduce the risk of heterogeneity in the individuals' experiences of political incarceration under the Communist Regime.
The selection process consisted in first gathering basic information about the studies (citation, author, title and year, abstract) in order to determine if these were relevant for my research. Once this was established, I sourced and read the full papers according to the inclusion criteria outlined above. The electronic searches yielded 187 journal articles, 97 books and 12 magazine articles. Mindful of academic requirements and word count limitations, it was important to select the most relevant knowledge for the current study, in line with the scope of the literature review.

2.1.   The Scope of the Existing Literature Review

In seeking an angle from which to explore the experiences of freedom before, during, and in the aftermath of the Communist Fall I was struck by the absence of research covering this particular topic and subgroup. There hasn't been much written on how former political prisoners experienced their freedom from an existential perspective. Most of the research studies conducted on former political detainees have focused on the long-term consequences of traumatic experiences (Bichescu et al, 2005; Maercker et al, 2000; Halvosen, 2010; Gluck et

al, 2012) and the analysis has viewed the experience from different theoretical perspectives, mainly clinical psychology.

The aim of these studies is to evaluate the effects of political imprisonment on mental health, as well as look at the sequelae of symptoms after liberation, or to explore how post release persecution poses further risks for post-traumatic symptoms (Gluck et al, 2012). The results of a recent systematic review on the effects of political imprisonment on mental health (Willis et al, 2015) indicate that the experience of political incarceration can lead to a range of psychiatric and somatic symptoms, including PTSD, depression, and anxiety. The results of these studies also indicate correlations between mental health difficulties experienced and other variables measured such as demographics, context of imprisonment, and the type of maltreatment that the prisoners were exposed to.

Whilst I am not denying the usefulness of clinical research focusing on the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder, I also think that the medicalization of their whole political, cultural, communal, and existential suffering could be invalidating and decontextualizing the subjective experiences of political prisoners, to the point where one risks contributing to the efforts of their persecutors. Since the purpose of the torture and violence of the Communist regime was to wound and demoralize individuals in respect of their capacity to assert themselves politically and culturally, often by using arbitrary psychiatric diagnoses and sectioning the non-compliant citizens, approaching their experiences from a medical angle risks undermining their struggle for freedom. In the words of Shannon Woodcock, a historian who studied the lived experience of women political prisoners in Albania, '*we need to take seriously the walls former political prisoners are up against and refuse to scaffold them with our work*' (2014, p.59).

As an existential practitioner, I do not view psychotherapy as a cure for the mentally ill and their pathological diagnoses, but rather as an aid for understanding, finding meaning in what Van Deurzen (1984) calls 'problems in living', challenges that all of us are confronted with by virtue of being alive. This is one of the main reasons why I chose to focus on the phenomenon of freedom rather than oppression, thereby allowing the participants the freedom to choose how to identify themselves in their stories.

I have concluded that an important aspect that is missing from the current literature is specifically an existential exploration of freedom and/or freedom restriction as it was experienced and lived by this specific group of people, an attempt to understand how these prisoners experienced their freedom before, during and after their political incarceration and

how it impacted on their existence. I also believe that there is a need to investigate how ex-political prisoners made sense of their lives post detention and how the carceral experience changed their sense of freedom.

This literature review helped me reflect on the gaps in theoretical notions of freedom and oppression and helped discern between economic and political liberties, civic liberties and philosophical freedom, as well as clarify and better understand the dichotomies of inner versus external or negative versus positive freedom.

As I stated before, the analysis concluded that there is limited availability of recent research articles on the experience of Communist 'prisoners of conscience' and their freedom. It is the purpose of this review to reflect on these gaps and highlight the potential importance of turning towards an experiential and phenomenological understanding of freedom. This review doesn't intend to be an exhaustive analysis of the vast literature on the topic of freedom but aims to offer an overview of the main philosophical and theoretical contributions in relation to this complex topic.

First, I will start by turning my attention to the current studies on political prisoners of the Communist Regime and further discuss the sparseness of research from an existential phenomenological perspective.

I will then go on exploring and critiquing the works of major existential philosophers and practitioners who concerned themselves with the study of freedom and its implication for clinical practice. Last but not least, I will embark upon a study of Eastern European and Romanian memorialist literature in order to shed some light on the experience of imprisonment and its impact on personal freedom – which would enable the reader to expand on the idea of existential freedom with sensitivity to the political, cultural, and geographical context of this specific group. Such attunement to former political prisoners' unique experiences could help us as clinicians direct our practice to promoting psychological recovery in a meaningful way. Although presented as separate sections for taxonomic purposes, the review areas are strongly interlinked and should be considered together in supporting the rationale of the current paper.

2.2.   Political Prisoners' Studies

Contrasting the numerous studies on Holocaust survivors, research on torture victims and former political prisoners of the Communist Gulag has been scarce up to now. The majority of

studies on the psychological health of political prisoners have been largely generated from within the field of clinical psychology and predominantly conducted in East Germany.

According to Willis, Chou and Hunt (2015) the clinical studies investigating the effects of political incarceration on mental well-being show significant variations in the presence and prevalence of symptoms. However, whilst exposure to torture and persecution during political imprisonment differed amongst the countries included in the studies reviewed, there was also a range of common experiences that the participants described in their accounts, both during and after incarceration.

The publications reviewed suggested that the main difficulties faced by this client group are long lasting, inclusive of mental health concerns such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, substance misuse, somatic complaints, and dissociative disorders. The most prevalent factors that seemed to have contributed to the maintenance of psychological difficulties amongst former political prisoners were persecution after release, lack of employment/education opportunities or rehabilitation, the absence of social support and social isolation (Willis, Chou, and Hunt, 2015).

2.2.1. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

The term post-traumatic stress disorder is frequently associated to trauma, and it became a household name since 1980, when it appeared in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder 3rd Edition (DSM-III); representing an important step in the diagnosis of a cluster of stress-related symptoms, which led to the use of terminology such as 'shell shock', 'war neurosis' and 'soldiers heart' (Wills et. al., 2015). The strong correlation of torture/maltreatment with mental illness has been documented in a systematic review by Steel et al. (2009), who concluded that PTSD was more widespread in individuals who had experienced physical and psychological maltreatment and mass conflict.

A number of studies focused on the identification and investigation of the prevalence of PTSD in former political prisoner populations (Bichescu et al, 2005; Boss et al, 1998; Maercker et al., 2000; Rebassoo, 2008; Heitzman and Rutkowski, 1997; Boos et al, 1998; Ehlers et al., 2000), finding a significantly higher prevalence (30% to 50%) in comparison with the general population.

In Bichescu et al.'s (2005) study on 59 former political survivors of the Romanian Communist Gulag, the lifetime prevalence of PTSD was 54%. When left untreated, the symptoms often

continued to manifest themselves over four decades, and PTSD markers were still currently present in a third of the participants. Other co-morbid clinical conditions were identified, amongst which substance misuse, dissociative and somatic disorders as well as chronic depression, suggesting that the long-term psychological effects of political incarceration are likely to outlast the changes in a country's political system. Interestingly, they also found that 62% of the control group described traumatic experiences which met criterion A (stressor) for PTSD, suggesting a high prevalence rate of conflict-related trauma at a societal level in post-Communist Romania.

2.2.2.   Anxiety and Depression

While PTSD may have become the hallmark condition and the dominant culture image for survivors of political imprisonment, depression and anxiety disorders have been found to be just as prevalent. A number of former political prisoners studies (Bauer et al., 1993; Jamieson et al, 2010; Weißflog et al., 2012) showed that depressive symptoms, anxiety, and suicidality had a significant prevalence, and this was a lot higher than the rates found among an age-matched population. The participants depression and anxiety levels were positively correlated with their PTSD scores (Bichescu et al, 2005).

Whilst a number of studies argued in favour of the usefulness of a PTSD diagnosis, others showed circumspection towards it, positing that psychiatric nosology does not fully capture the experiential range of torture survivors contextually, nor does it illuminate the effect of trauma on personal values, core beliefs, or spirituality (Turner & Gorst-Unsworth, 1990; Summerfield, 2001**).**

2.2.3.   Somatic Complaints

There was a significantly higher number of physical complaints amongst former political detainees that the control group population (Weißflog et al., 2012) and the prisoners' anxiety and/or depression scores were positively corelated with the presence of somatic complaints. This finding was also echoed in Bichescu et al. (2005)'s study, which concluded that there was a negative correlation between the participants' PTSD symptomatology and their physical health, indicating the likelihood of comorbidity between physical and psychological concerns.

2.2.4.   Social Isolation vs Social Support

The higher rates of trauma reported by former political prisoners were not only in direct relation to their experience of political detention but extended to their persecution and oppression before and after release. Political prisoners were shown to face additional challenges to reintegrate in society compared to 'ordinary' prisoners, with many reporting facing practical, financial and societal challenges as well as further persecution after release.

Glück, Tran, & Leuger-Schuster (2012) posit that post-release persecution and prevailing issues with social integration and employment constitute a significant contributing factor in the maintenance of posttraumatic symptomatology. This was supported by Halvorsen and Kagee's (2010) findings according to which the distress rooted in the primary detention trauma can be significantly amplified by financial concerns or unemployment post release.

Willis, Chou and Hunt (2015) pointed out the challenges of measuring the impact of conflict-related trauma and its shattering effects on the individual and society alike, considering the gargantuan efforts required by communities to adapt to a new status quo and rebuild economic and social networks, considering the lack of support services and resources available to those affected. Another important aspect that was highlighted in their research related to the changes in the social constructions of trauma and the difficulties that these individuals can have to conceptualise their experiences and accept psychosocial support, drawing attention to the effects on the individuals' understanding and interpretations of their traumatic experience.

With regards to the factors that were predictive of mental well-being, Denis et al. (1997) found that employment in a professional career post release led to significantly less psychological and somatic complaints in ex political prisoners of East Germany, which in turn led to an increase likelihood of receiving social support and psychological assistance post release.

In the same vein, Bichescu et al.'s (2005) findings indicated that psychological support was correlated with significant lower rate of current PTSD, dissociative disorders and substance abuse in the targeted population in former political prisoners of the Romanian Gulag.

2.2.5.   Mental Defeat vs Autonomous Frame of Mind

In Ehlers et al. (2000) study on former political prisoners of East Germany, mental defeat emerged as a unique predictor of PTSD symptom severity, accounting for the presence of post-

traumatic stress within the sample over and above threat to life. The concept of mental defeat is particularly relevant to the experience of political incarceration as threat to an individual's psychological autonomy is an aspect of the psychological trauma intentionally inflicted by a prison system based mainly on methods of physical and psychological weakening.

Mental defeat has been defined as the perceived loss of all autonomy, a state of giving up in one's own mind all efforts to retain one's humanity and agency. The experience of mental defeat has many facets and has been subjectively described as acute hopelessness, a perceived lack of or controllability over one's emotions and thoughts, as well as losing one's identity and a human being with a will of one's own.

The authors of the study emphasized the distinction between mental defeat and the actions of defeat, drawing attention to the signing of false confessions by many prisoners or other acts of apparent concessions that reflected the prisoners' will to live rather than a sign of mental capitulation.

The theoretical concept that is placed on the opposite pole of mental defeat was labelled as '*autonomous frame of mind'*. According to the authors, the political prisoners displaying this characteristic reported that throughout their incarceration they 'retained *a sense of freedom of mind and that their will, convictions, or character were unshakable* (Ehlers et al., 2000, p.49) These individuals also identified themselves as morally superior to the perpetrators and remained hopeful that the political system would change and that they would be rehabilitated one day.

2.2.6. Permanent Change and Alienation

Another variable identified as a significant predictor for post-traumatic symptomatology related to the extent to which participants perceived that their carceral experience led to a negative and permanent change in their personality or irrevocably disrupted their life values and goals. Individuals who perceived that their personality or life was irreversibly damaged by the incarceration and experienced a sense of irreversible rupture to their lives before imprisonment showed a higher level of mental distress than those who didn't.

A further important aspect that has been identified as a predictor of trauma severity was alienation and its negative effects on victims' interpersonal relationships. Saporta and van der Kolk (1992) reviewed clinical descriptions and evidence that trauma disrupts attachment. This is consistent with Stolorow's (2007) relational account of trauma and his conceptualization of

it as the loss of attachment. In line with his emphasis of the need for a 'relational home' that can contain traumatized states, there is accumulating evidence that lack of validation or perceived negative responses from other people in the immediate aftermath of the trauma are correlated with chronic symptoms of PTSD (Davis, Brickman, & Baker, 1991; Dunmore et al., 1999, 2001; Ulman, 1996). Ehlers, Clark, et al. (1998) found that an overall feeling of alienation resulting from a perceived inability to relate to other people was related to poor therapeutic outcomes.

2.2.7. Political Commitment

Besides alienation from other people, alienation from oneself and one's life values and goals has also been shown to play a role in the maintenance of PTSD in former political prisoners of East Germany (Ehlers et al, 2000). Conversely, following the compass of one's values and beliefs and political commitment were identified as having a buffering and protective effect during imprisonment (Basoglu et al., 1996; Hotlz, 1998).

If political commitment does provide protective effects against the development of post-traumatic stress disorder, challenges must have been faced by former prisoners of the Communist Gulag who sought to maintain political commitment after release, since affiliation with anti-Communist political groups was deemed as illegal and hindered their reintegration with society. Also, a significant number of those arrested in Communist Romania had no political affiliation and did not directly oppose the political system. Reasons for imprisonment included not reporting others to the authorities or complaining about the harsh socio-economic conditions. Unlike the ones who showed direct opposition and held strong ideological beliefs, for this category it might have been more difficult to assign meaning to their experience of imprisonment and torture.

2.2.8. Aging

Jamieson et al. (2010); Maercker et al., (2000) highlighted the additional pressures of decreased mobility, diminished sensory capacities, financial difficulties, isolation, loss of support and status, and cognitive impairment brought on by the aging process within former political prisoners.

Whilst some studies found that the prevalence rates of post-traumatic stress tend to decrease with age (Darves-Bornoz et al., 2008; Kessler et al., 2005), this was not true for societies where elderly populations have been exposed to conflict related trauma, which can lead to reactivation of symptoms or delayed onset Glück et al., (2012), Andrews, Brewin, Philpott, & Stewart (2007). In Rebassoo's (2008) study on Estonian political prisoner, older age was correlated with an increase in post-traumatic symptoms. Age related changes in the symptom profile were also reported, including cortical disinhibition (Glück & Maercker, 2012) and interpretation of psychological difficulties as somatic complaints (Cook, 2001) and more hyperarousal symptoms Maercker et al. (2013).

2.2.9   Limitations

The designs of the above studies were mainly cross-sectional, case–control and cohort designs of retrospective nature. One methodological limitation of this is the risk of recall bias, since participants are asked to recall their experiences of political imprisonment and sequelae of symptoms a long period after release. The low sample sizes and reliance on self-report methods can also affect the statistical power of these studies or run the risk of under or over-reporting of symptoms.

Other factors that these studies haven't accounted for were potential cultural differences in the symptoms reported or participants' subjectivity in the interpretations of somatic symptoms. Conditions and effects of political imprisonment are likely to vary between countries and historical eras and researchers need to incorporate and demonstrate a sensitivity to the local geo-political context of the study in order to understand the effects of political imprisonment and highlight similarities and differences between the various variables that mediate or increase the risks for the long-term effects on the mental health the client group.

The clinical studies reviewed so far have viewed the experiences of political imprisonment through the lens of psychiatric nosology, closely following the diagnostic criteria of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). However, the hegemony of the medical model of traumatization and the usefulness of 'acronym therapies' in conceptualizing the needs of this target population has been questioned by researchers in the field (Meichenbaum, 2012; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

In a qualitative study conducted on former South African political detainees, Kagee (2004)

found that PTSD symptomatology was not as salient as economic or somatic complaints, dissatisfaction with the present political context, which were important themes that emerged from his sample. The study critiqued the use of standardized clinical questionnaires and checklists when studying the experiences of former political prisoners, which is his view reflect the effect of demand characteristics rather than the actual experiences and concerns of this population. The author posits that an alternative paradigm for interpreting distress which is ontologically and ideologically broader and more inclusive of social, political, and economic factors as they impact on individuals' psychological state and sense of well-being, may have important implications for the development of interventions for this client group.

As an existential practitioner and counselling psychology trainee, I think that it is imperative to consider the pluralistic nature and commitment to social justice of the CoP profession, its acknowledgement of the uniqueness of individual experiences and its sensitivity to historical, socio-political contexts and relational matrix in which clients and therapists co-exist). These characteristics don't seem to have been fully reflected in the treatment options offered to this client group. Interventions focused solely on the amelioration of post-traumatic stress disorder symptomatology and what mental health professionals presume to be salient for them may have less utility than those based on the actual expressed needs of this client group.

For some of the Gulag survivors, carceral detention itself may not be construed as the most traumatizing, but rather the dissatisfaction with the political developments in post-Communist Romania. For example, present coalitions between communist political parties and democratic ones, the presence of former Communist activists in leadership roles as well as the generalized infrastructural corruption, may leave former political prisoners with a feeling that their sufferings may have been in vain. Such current contextual factors may play an understated role in the meaning that former political prisoners imbue their experience in detention with.

Whilst I am not denying the fact that symptoms of traumatization do occur and can constitute an important dimension in the experience of former detainees, I believe that it is pivotal to place these symptoms in context by calling attention to the variety of other pressing issues that former detainees might face and that may also be appropriate targets of intervention.

This is one of the main reasons why I chose to focus on an experiential and phenomenological understanding of freedom rather than trauma/oppression, thereby allowing the voices of marginalized individuals to be heard and giving them the freedom to choose how to identify themselves in their stories. Bjorkund et al. (2000) suggest that research questions have the

potential to sensitize respondents to the nature of a clinical category that is being assessed (i.e. PTSD), which can result in their endorsement of the symptoms by virtue of what they perceive to be expected, rather than their phenomenological experience.

Language and storytelling not only offer a means of expression of the subjective psychological experience of the participants, but they may also provide structure to the manifestation of that experience in the interview context (White, 2000).

The focus on the issue of freedom as it was experienced before, during and after detention in my research question was an attempt to broaden the paradigm of psychopathology which has been largely framed in terms of the 'western trauma discourse' (Summerfield, 1999). I believe that an existential phenomenological exploration of freedom would provide the participants with the liberty to illuminate and expand on other silent aspects of their lived experience, be it political, social, economic, or ideological - rather than trying to organize their discourse to fit the demand characteristics of the clinical context or other prevailing expectations.

With this in mind, I will first embark on an exploration and critique of the works of major existential philosophers and practitioners who concerned themselves with the study of freedom and its implication for clinical practice. After this, I move on to discussing Eastern European and Romanian writings in order to further nuance the concept of existential freedom with a sensitivity to political, cultural, and geographical context of this specific group.

2.3.   Freedom and Politics

Current political theories on freedom mainly focus on the dichotomy between *negative liberty* and *positive liberty,* which was framed by Isaiah Berlin (1958) in his famous Oxford lecture 'Two Concepts of Liberty'. In Berlin's view, positive freedom is 'the freedom which consists in being one's own master' (1958: p. 131) or *freedom to* while negative freedom is 'the freedom which consists in not being prevented from choosing as I do by other men' (1958: p. 131-32), also known as *freedom from.*

Berlin aptly argues that the concept of positive liberty, despite being essential to a decent existence, has been more often politically abused or morally perverted in history than that of negative liberty. To illustrate this, he states that both the Nazi and Communist states have coerced their citizens to realize what their coercers believe to be their 'true' freedom, or the 'true' freedom of the nation state, silencing the needs of the individuals.

Other political philosophers like Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) have enlarged on Berlin's picture by pointing out to the subordination of freedom under totalitarianism, to the point that freedom appears anathema to politics. In her writings, she vehemently overturns not only the forces of totalitarianism, whose surrogates were Stalin and Hitler, but also the liberal concern with the life process and the growing bourgeoisie appointed as 'protectors' of freedom, drawing attention to man's entrapment in historicism and the destruction of the free-thinking individual. To counter the automatism of ordinary existence of the masses, Arendt turns to 'philosophizing against philosophy'– that is, the ideologies that found expression in the totalitarian regimes referred to earlier – by going back to   the Roman republican notion of freedom according to which all human beings are endowed with freedom as a fundamental given. For Arendt, although freedom can be found mainly in the political arena, its generation resides in the individuals who constitute this sphere.

By turning to politics, Arendt opposes the modern proclivity to explicate freedom philosophically as an inner realm of the mind or a function of the conscience. Drawing on Heidegger's (1927) existential ideas, she maintains that 'the substance of man is not mind, but …existence' (1946: p. 47), making the essence-existence wedding the steppingstone for her theory of political action:

'*Men are free –as distinguished from their possessing the gift of freedom – as long as they act, neither before nor after; for to be free and to act are the same"* (1968: p. 47)

In Arendt's view, action as the manifestation of freedom is borne out of what she terms as *natality,* a *sui generis* capacity to begin, to start afresh, to do the unexpected. By taking action individuals re-enact the inherent mystery of their birth, which is actualized every time a person acts.

Although Arendt doesn't explicitly discuss the issue of oppression in a concentrationary universe like the one of the Communist Gulag, her theory of political action provides useful insights into the conceptualization of freedom under totalitarianism. The strong existential thread that is present throughout her work on freedom has mainly been attributed to Heidegger and Jaspers, whose philosophical ideas on freedom I will discuss in the next section of this paper.

2.4.   Freedom as Ontological

An important thing to keep in mind when discussing philosophical works is that they are mainly concerned to describe the abstract (*ontological*) dimension of life and human living in a very general sense before exploring the concrete (*ontic*) experience of the individual. Unlike the field of clinical psychology, sociology, or politics, these are descriptions that tell us what the *sine qua non* of human existence is – approaching concepts like freedom or death in a very general way, without any sensitivity to geographical, cultural, or historical contexts.

In his *magnum opus* 'Being and Time", Heidegger (1927) refers to freedom in connection to the idea of 'choice to choose oneself' (1927: p. 197). For Heidegger, the essence of freedom is synonymous with 'existence', with *Dasein*'s ecstatic embrace of the world. For him, Being-in-the-world is primordially derived from the basic feature of *Dasein*'s existence, which is freedom. As a result, for Heidegger anything that has the structure of being in the world must be free: freedom is co-extensive with *Dasein*.

Heidegger distinguishes between *ontological* freedom, which is bound up with and constitutive of Existence, and *ontic freedom* which has to do more with *Dasein*'s freedom of choosing and taking hold on oneself. From this point of view, human beings are ontologically free to choose either authentic living or self-deception. For Heidegger, the ontic state of unassumed living by absorption in the world of the *They* or by existential non-differentiation are two ways of making oneself unfree. By contrast, in choosing to 'choose oneself' wholeheartedly, *Dasein* makes possible, first and foremost, its authentic potentiality for being. Only in this scenario freedom can be fully articulated and become an '*impassioned freedom towards death - a freedom which has been released from the illusions of the 'They'* (Heidegger, 1927: p.226) and which is heightened by the immediacy of death.

For the German philosopher, once the potentiality of death is understood and its omnipresence is sensed, human beings can be shocked into the possibility of authentic existing. Turning to the current research topic, if facing death with fortitude can shake individuals out of their dormant existence and enhances their sense of self, then one can assume that the circumstances of detention and the daily confrontation with the limits of existence in the case of political prisoners heightened their consciousness of freedom.

A similar view is present in 'Being and Nothingness' (1943), Sartre's ontological-phenomenological treatise on human freedom. In his attempt to describe the foundational

structures of human existence and answer the question '*What does it mean to be human*?' Sartre's response is that - unlike inert matter – human beings have consciousness and as such they are free. According to him, freedom is the edifice of human Being and cannot be eradicated even by the most adverse circumstances.

In Sartre's view freedom is synonymous with human consciousness. Unlike the world of things and objectivity (Being-in-Itself), consciousness (Being-for-itself) is characterised by its non-coincidence with itself, it is the free subject perpetually creating its own existence. He argues that consciousness always escapes itself both because it is intentional (it always targets an object other than itself) and temporal (it is always future oriented) **(**Sartre, 1943: p. 573-4). Sartre's view is that human freedom consists in the 'Pour-Soi's ability to evade the here and now; as such, in an ontological sense, no individual can fail to be free.

Sartre coined the expression '*existence precedes essence*', meaning that in his view human beings have no essence or substance prior to their coming into Being. As an atheist philosopher, Sartre believes that '*Being is what it is*', rejecting the idea that the world was created for a reason, or that God is behind Creation. Human beings first of all exist; for him there is no 'essence' which exists outside or inside beings. Sartre writes '*no limits to my freedom can be found except freedom itself or, if you prefer, that we are not free to cease being free.*' (1943: p. 439).

Demonstrating his radical stance on freedom, Sartre posits that '…*man is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet, in other respects is free; because, once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does*' (1957: p.296). With this, Sartre is also stating that freedom comes with the weight of responsibility – suggesting that responsibility and freedom are deeply interconnected.

Echoing Heidegger's *Geworfenheit*[2], Sartre recognizes the matter-of-fact character of human finitude and the limits that the world imposes on human beings which he calls facticity. He argues that all individuals are thrown into the world or into a 'situation', which he calls the facticity of the human condition. Despite this, however, Sartre's radical freedom implies that individuals always have a choice, like the soldier who can always take the option to either kill in the war, the option to defect or the option of suicide. In his view, being able to choose is synonymous with being free.

---

[2] Thrownness in Dahlstrom, D. O. (2013). *The Heidegger Dictionary*. London: A & C Black, p. 212

Heidegger and Sartre take a similar stance in that they view the self as dynamically created through our nexus of relationships with others and the world. They differ in that Sartre introduces the radical freedom of human agency, that we are more active in creating the life that we lead and therefore the person we become; whereas for Heidegger *Dasein* is seen as a potentiality towards, retaining that what we become comes out of our constant interactions with others and the world. Ernesto Spinelli (2007) argues against Sartre's radical freedom by stating that '*there exist conditions of being where no choice presents itself…and that the choices that may exist are always situated in a set of thrown conditions, whose presence can neither be chosen nor truly controlled*' (2007: p. 45).

Indeed, if one attempts to apply Sartre's ideas to the topography of the Communist labour camps, it appears that in his view the political prisoners were free. They made their choice to obey, not to commit suicide or defect. Were they in bad faith? Sartre would most probably say yes, the prisoners had control over their reaction to imprisonment: they could have resisted or acquiesced but chose not to. Therefore, to him being Romanian, a political prisoner, an anti-communist or a philosopher is "For-Itself's" own makings: men are just as free under Nazi occupation as they are in the re-education labour camps of the Romanian Gulag. Controversially, Sartre would argue that the essential freedom of these men remained the same before, during and after the totalitarian enslavement of the Communist regime.

In his critique of Sartre's ontology of freedom Marcuse (1948) aptly argues that: '*the treatise on human freedom has here reached the point of self-abdication… The persecution of the Jews and the terror, which is the world today, they are the brute reality of un-freedom…The fact that Sartre's demonstration is ontologically correct, and a time-honoured and successful feature of idealism only proves the remoteness of this demonstration from the "réalité humaine'* (1948, p. 322).

If philosophy, by virtue of its existential-ontological concepts of man or freedom, is capable of demonstrating that the persecuted prisoners of conscience and the victim of the executioner are and remain absolutely free and masters of a self-responsible choice, then these philosophical concepts have declined to the level of empty ideology, an ideology which offers itself as a most handy justification for the persecutors. In line with Berlin's warnings against the distortions brought on by the concept of 'positive liberty' and Arendt's imperative to 'philosophize against philosophy", Marcuse (1948) argues that Sartre's free choice between death and enslavement is neither freedom nor choice, because both alternatives destroy the very human reality which is co-extensive with freedom.

2.5.   Freedom and Oppression

In his later work, Sartre dedicates more time to the specific issue of oppression. In his Notebooks (1947), he argues that oppression consists not in the absence of choice, but having to choose between bad, inhumane options (1947). He also adds that in all master-slave relations, the self-conception of the victim and perpetrator are intertwined and distorted; both parties are in 'bad faith"; both fail to fully understand their own freedom. However, although both perpetrator and victim are in bad faith, only the slave is coerced physically (1947). Although the ideas mentioned above make Sartre's account of freedom less theoretically abstract, they are still removed from the crude realities of political oppression; by arguing that man is more likely to access his freedom and transcend himself when 'under occupation' since his lacking freedom is more palpable, Sartre risks of justifying the restrictions of political freedoms and become an apologist for one of the worst kinds of oppression, so long as it hides behind the banner of liberation.

Merleau-Ponty (1945) directly challenged Sartre's ontological representation of freedom as absolute in both Adventures of the Dialectic (1955) and the Phenomenology of Perception (1945).

The philosopher argued that the world in which we come to life is already imbued with meaning and our freedom can solely develop against this framework. According to him, we are thrown into a world which is populated with objects, languages, customs, opportunities, and limitations, and we are ontologically dependent on situations that are already articulated for us. For the French philosopher, our free engagement with the world is contingent on this prior 'field' of meanings in which we find ourselves ontologically (1945: p. 500). Unlike Sartre's absolute freedom, Merleau-Ponty sees freedom *not on the hither side of my being, but before me, in things'* (1945: p.516*),* a meeting point of the inner and the outer, the body and the world: '*we choose our world, and the world chooses us*' (1945: p.26). That is to say, the world can transform us, but our orientation towards the world can also shape our reality, since we evaluate objects in terms of their influence on us.

Merleau-Ponty replaces Sartre's tenet '*humans are condemned to be free*' with one which is more fitting for the philosophical stance of dialogical existentialism: '*humans are condemned to meaning*'. For him, the full essence of human experience will always evade rational reflection, but nonetheless it is imbued with meaning making and giving. In contrast to Sartre,

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology emphasized the unity of consciousness with the empirical world and man's inherent sociability.

In the same vein, Merleau-Ponty's view of freedom as something that 'comes into being in the act of accepting limits'(1964) points to another significant divergence from the radical existentialism of Sartre for whom freedom is held to be absolute. Together with Heidegger, Jaspers and Buber, Merleau-Ponty supports a dialogical relational freedom in which the context dictates the general framework of human action, considering that personal agency is limited against that backdrop.

The implications of these ideas for my research topic are that the political prisoners' meeting with a previously constituted world of oppression might have still accommodated free action, in so much as there was a perpetual exchange between them and their world; however, in rendering their freedom as 'absolute', one would be distorting the scope of this very freedom – since the their oppressive environment is that historical contexts were tangible realities   and not of their own making; as a result, one cannot divorce these individuals freedom from their insertion in the world.

2.6.   Freedom and Transcendence

In 'Psychology of Worldviews', Jaspers (1919) reflects on our ability to influence or direct our lives in the face of what he called 'limit-situations', advancing the idea that existence confronts human beings with implacable givens, one of which is the anticipation of one's mortality and own finitude; he posits that by openly facing up to these fundamental '*Grenzsituationen*' and coming to terms with them, human beings can uphold their integrity and attain their freedom.

This 'boundary' awareness is a pivotal feature in Jasper's philosophical work: transitory aspects fade away and their shattering force becomes unveiled: we must die, we must struggle, and we are subject to chance. These fundamental situations of our existence have been described as 'ultimate', since once we become aware of them, we also become fundamentally conscious of the limitations of our knowledge and choices.

However, for Jaspers confrontation with one's limits also constitutes an initial mode of transcending in world-orientation, a contact with the 'freedom of *Existenz*, an existential freedom which points beyond itself through an awareness that "before Transcendence, everything is nothing" (Jaspers, 1971: p.65).To 'think oneself free' is to think oneself beyond,

projecting oneself into the broader context that contains existence, which Jaspers calls 'the open horizon' or 'the transcendent'. However, despite our efforts being always retreats before us, we can never reach the 'true' space where there is no beyond. It follows that for Jaspers, freedom represents this movement from the small to the big, in order not to possess the big, but to cut free from the small and all the constraint it represents (Goldman, 2012).

Thus, for Jaspers freedom is coterminous with the act of transcending, it exists as neither objective nor subjective but as a feature of possible *Existenz*, a necessary moving step towards Transcendence itself. In this respect, Jaspers' view is remarkably similar to Merleau-Ponty's conception of freedom as a convergence of the inner and the outer to which I referred earlier. Merleau-Ponty contends that the concept of absolute liberty has no meaning; freedom is intelligible only in a situation. He figuratively paints this phenomenon as the 'centrifugal' forces of the human self-meeting the 'centripetal' forces of the environment. As I have shown above, Heidegger also identifies the constraints of human freedom in being thrown (*Geworfenheit*) into a factual situation (*Faktizität*) and being limited in significant ways as a result.

As the territory of possible *Existenz*, freedom is fraught with potentiality. Although human will could be inoperative in a specific moment or context, the reality of freedom which underlies it is infallible, for freedom provides the premise of its own denial. Here Jaspers' philosophical conception of freedom has Sartrean echoes, 'the only being which can be called free is the Being which annihilates its Being.' If we forget this, then, as Jaspers says, '*we slip through the net of being*.' (Olson, 1979, p. 25)

Jaspers distinguishes between freedom and will, since the act of willing is only possible due to the individual's freedom to will. For the German philosopher, the act of willing is related both intentionally and referentially to that which is other than the will, which is transcendence; As such, freedom has deeper metaphysical connotations for Jaspers than the will, seen as a problem for Ethics.

2.7.   Freedom and Responsibility

Similar to Jaspers, Frankl subscribes the concept of freedom to the noetic dimension, delineating it from the material world. Since human beings are not only psychophysical but also spiritual beings, they are fundamentally free by virtue of their transcendent nature. Frankl

understands freedom as 'freedom from' and 'freedom to', but in a quite different way from Berlin's political distinction between negative and positive liberty that I pointed to earlier in this paper. For Frankl, human freedom is not a freedom from but rather a freedom to.

'All freedom has a 'from what' and a 'to what'. The 'from what' of man's freedom is his being driven, and the 'to what' is his being responsible, his having conscience' (2011a, p. 59).

His conceptualisation of freedom echoes that of Eric Fromm (1900-1980), for whom 'freedom from' on its own can be a destructive force unless accompanied by the creative element of 'freedom to', which requires the involvement of the self in purposeful creative acts, a spontaneous realisation of the self through a true connectedness with others and the world. Fromm (1941) argues that many people try to escape their freedom through conformity, destructiveness or authoritarianism, since external freedom can never be utilised to the full without an equivalent inner freedom. Since human beings belong to the noetic dimension, they can rise above their drives, emotions and dispositions and are free to choose whether they listen to the messages coming from their psychophysical dimension and turn these into action or not. In a similar vein, for Frankl the positive side of freedom is realized in self-transcendence, meaning that we can consciously direct ourselves towards our values and meaning.

For the Austrian philosopher, our freedom is responsibility, in the sense that we have a moral obligation to realize our meaning and values. He argues responsibility to be the 'essence of existence' (Frankl, 1992, p. 114), stating that humans are much more than the product of heredity and environment and our ultimate motivation is the will to meaning. In his view, we are all questioned by life and the only way to respond to this is by becoming responsible.

Unlike Sartre, Frankl argues that there is only one way to realize our freedom and that our single goal is *a priori* to our values and meanings. To him, essence precedes existence, and we can only achieve our freedom in so far as we calibrate our meaning with the supra-meaning in a wilful 'ought':

'The 'ought' is ontologically prior to the will. Just as I can only answer if I am first questioned, just as each reply requires a 'to what', and such a 'to what' must be prior to the reply itself, so the 'to what' of all responsibleness must necessarily be prior to responsibleness itself. What I feel that I ought to do, or ought to be, could never be effective if it were nothing but an invention of mine – rather than a discovery.' (Frankl, 2011a, p. 64)

For Frankl, the sort of person that the prisoner became during incarceration was not only the result of camp influences, but also the result of an inner decision. In terms of how this applies to the current study, it follows that any individual can fundamentally decide what shall become of them, mentally and spiritually, even when they are faced up with the most degrading circumstances. They can retain their dignity and spiritual freedom even when they are in a prison, labour or concentration camp:

'We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way'. (1984, p.86)

Similarly, to Jaspers and other dialogical existentialists, Frankl's idea of freedom is inseparable form a self-transcendental orientation towards value and meaning, which for Frankl are grounded in God. Since the person is finally oriented towards meaning and wants to realize meaning due to its will to meaning, the person can only understand itself in relation to a transcendent entity. Each realization of meaning originates in God and is a movement towards God. We are only free as long as we are congruent with 'inner voice' within. In his view, people often find themselves in a vacuum of meaning (Frankl 1948, 1955).

From a philosophical point of view, although Frankl accepts that atheistic or agnostic individuals will not identify this transcendent 'inner voice' with God's voice, this identification is inevitable within his ontology. He makes it clear that all human beings are related to God, but for non- religious individuals this intentional relation to transcendence takes place unconsciously.

In order to further elucidate the rationale for this research project, I have so far provided a review of the seminal literature and of some of the major philosophical contributions that has shaped and defined the Western understanding of freedom. Further, I end this section by exploring an Eastern European understanding of freedom and thus moving closer to the socio-cultural and geo-political context that is the focus of this research.

As thoroughly as existential philosophers have examined and described freedom and its different facets, illuminating its ontological nature and universality, they have not explored its specifics across different groups and subgroups and therefore the changed *experience* of freedom.

The review of literature so far shows that within the framework of Western philosophy, freedom is regarded either as an ontological given, absolute or indestructible – or as an inner state, and act of transcending or an anachronist relationship with God or Being. Neither of these views allows for the conceptualization of oppression as the denial of freedom nor considers it as a constructed limit placed unjustly on a group that was consistently exploited, subjugated and mistreated over 50 years. Moreover, none of the above philosophers calls into question the lived experience or limitations of an oppressed subgroup of people, but rather discuss the personal and individual experience of a given subject *in abstractio (*i.e., Sartre's prisoner in 'The Nazi and the Jew'*),* removed from the geo-political context within which freedom or oppression was lived and with tools specific to the Western thought paradigm.

In order to better contextualize and narrow the focus to the specific experience of freedom and oppression of political prisoners of the Romanian Gulag without the filter of Western philosophical theories, I will now turn to the local school of thought and memorialist literature following the collapse of the Communist regime.

2.8.   Freedom in Eastern European Thinking

For Romanian historian and phenomenologist of religion Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), freedom consists precisely in the ontological rupture, the leap beyond, not the accomplishment of a political or historical condition in the present tense of an ever-changing world. Similarly, to Frankl's ideas described above, his philosophical view is that essence precedes existence, man being essentially the search for meaning and an ultimate reality of the truth of being.

We have previously shown that for Sartre, man is fundamentally free precisely because it has no origin, no essence and it is ever becoming and is making himself from himself. Eliade opposes this historicist understanding by stating that one needs '*to accept a philosophy of freedom that doesn't exclude God. … faith, in this context as in many others, means an absolute emancipation from any kind of natural 'law' and hence the highest freedom that man can imagine: freedom to intervene even in ontological constitution of the Universe. It is consequently a pre-eminently creative freedom.'* (Eliade, 1961, p. 160-61)

Eliade argues that man is free not through their capacity for action and creation *ex nihilo* as Sartre posited, but through the creative freedom entailed by faith as the foundation for meaning and human presence in the Universe. In his view, the terror of history can only be abolished by

the creative freedom of a human consciousness that is freed by the pre-judgement of human finitude through an act of faith.

Eliade defined Sartre's existentialism as a historicism, an engulfment in history and the un-essential. Form him, this is sufficient to reject *de plano* the whole rhetoric of Sartrean existentialism, together with his staging of a self-constructing man in the historical praxis of For-Itself engagement. For him, Sartre's atheistic humanism is the humanism of a despair that needs to be turned into a historical act, self-construction and freedom of the human subject.

Although not a systematic philosopher, Solzhenitsyn (1973) illustrates his concept of freedom in his *Gulag Archipelago*, where he describes the inhumane conditions in the Soviet labour camps and what it means *not* to be free. For Solzhenitsyn, freedom is not an abstraction, and neither is the absence of freedom. For him, the only way to achieve freedom is to overcome the spiritual malaise of the modern era and to re-discover the transcendent core in our Being.

He equates the absence of freedom with the absence of an introspective, reflective life. In his view, the West's lack of spiritual fulfilment is so deep, and the numinous is so gravely absent from people's lives, that it's surprising that people haven't already gone totally deranged. For the Russian philosopher, the spiritual crisis in the West is more profound than the other political, economic, and environmental crises.

Another Eastern European existentialist that is less popular in the Western world is Lev Seshtov. In his *Apotheosis of Groundlessness* (1920) he emphasised the need for inwardness and subjectivity in the search for truth and opposed the dominating European philosophy of the time. Echoing Kierkegaard, he boldly posits that the only way to restore human freedom is through religious faith as the ultimate source of man's deliverance from despair. In *Athens and Jerusalem* (1966*)*, he opposes the positivist and the metaphysical worldviews and argues that science and speculative philosophy have not liberated man but rather served to eradicate the freedom that he was originally endowed with by God.

A similar account of freedom is present in the philosophical work of N. Steinhardt (1912-1989). Born in Bucharest to a Jewish family, Steinhardt was a prolific writer and philosopher between the two wars. During the totalitarian regime in Romania, he spent four years in communist prisons and wrote extensively about his experience in the Romanian labour camps of Gherla, Aiud and Jilava.

His *magnum opus* The Diary of Happiness (1991) is a philosophical account of imprisonment and salvation through spirituality – particularly the Christian faith. The Journal covers 48 years

of memories, centred on the carceral period from 1960-1964. The Journal proposes three secular practical 'solutions' as routes to freedom in the face of totalitarianism, apart from the mystical solution of faith:

'I don't know of anything else out there that can be used to escape a concentrationary universe, the entanglements of a Kafkaesque trial…. Only these three. Any one of them is sufficient, adequate, and liberating. Remember: Solzhenitsyn, Zinoviev, Churchill, and Bukowski. Death acquiesced, assumed, anticipated, provoked; indifference and impudence; courage together with rabid glee. You're free to choose. But you ought to realise that – humanly speaking – there is no other way to face out of the steel circle' (1991, p. 3)

The secular routes to freedom proposed by Steinhardt are therefore embodied by the literary heroes of Solzhenitsyn and Zinoviev, as well as those of two historical figures. The first solution is described in the Gulag Archipelago and refers to one declaring them dead from the moment of entering a concentrationary universe. In Steinhardt's view, this would lead to freedom, because the individual can no longer be threatened, blackmailed or deceived. His second route is allegorically represented by the Tramp, the maladjusted individual at the edge of society who escapes the system by existentially projecting himself once and for all, a stray dog, a Buddhist beggar monk, a fool, a madman for (into) freedom.

Last but not least, Steinhardt turns to Churchill and Bukowski to illustrate the attitude by which in the presence of tyranny, oppression or misfortune one not only refuses to give up, but they extract out of all calamities the most ardent desire to live and to fight. In Steinhardt's view, this solution is also absolute, because it's based on a paradox: the more one is hit and made to suffer, the more one rejoices and strengthens.

Steinhardt's routes to freedom echo Heidegger's idea of freedom towards death, man's choice to choose himself, also reflected in Arendt's allegory of Achilles as the epitome of freedom through courage and assumed authentic living. In this sense, freedom is akin to an enhanced and more fluid conception of agency and self-determination (Hanna, 2011). For Steinhardt, totalitarianism is not only the unification of an economic theory with a biological or social one but it's mostly the manifestation of an attraction to death, or mortality, to use Arendt's terminology: '*the secret of those that cannot be sucked into the totalitarian abyss is simple: they love life, not death*' (Steinhardt, 1991, p.3).

Eastern European thought seems to revolve more around the noetic dimension of freedom, what Rollo May (1981) called 'essential freedom', positing that in order to be free in society one

must first be free inwardly. Whist acknowledging the fundamental role that the institutions of democracy and the market society play in protecting civil liberties, these ideas imply that they are not enough to generate the cultural and spiritual reserves that people need in order to feel free; freedom lies squarely in the domain of final values and is only indirectly related to liberty and the political.

Romanian philosopher Mihai Sora (1916 -) articulated an original philosophical theory of social dialogue, political pluralism and civil society. In his view, the tension between political realism and philosophical idealism needs to be carefully balanced when it comes to freedom, since it challenges us to rethink the relationship between ontological salvation, authenticity, and liberal principles and values. Just like the other Eastern European thinkers mentioned above, he cogently posits that freedom has an incredibly significant inner dimension that is all too often overlooked by modern political philosophers, which he captures in the concept of the 'dialogue intérieur', which helps one remain vigilant to their existential choices. However, he states that each individual needs equally to encourage others to manifest their inner freedom and work with them in order to build an authentic political community in which *'being' is duly honoured and placed above 'having'* (Crăiuțu, 2007, p. 618).

Sora's philosophy postulates a powerful link between the ontological and the political dimension of freedom, arguing for the generalization of the inner dialogue at the level of the individual to a societal level. His theory of dialogical community reconsiders the relationship between instrumental and final values, whereby the role of politics is ensure the minimal conditions for an adequate social interaction between free and equal individuals, in which the 'generalized dialogue' is pivotal in order to rebuild the social bonds and the public sphere that had been shattered by the Communist Era (Crăiuțu, 2007). Echoing the dialogical thinkers discussed in the previous section, the emphasis in Sora's political philosophy is on the meeting point between the individual and the community, where freedom emerges from the dynamism of the intersubjective space. Sora's work is truly relevant for this study particularly since it emerges out of his own lived experience of Communism where the public realm of inter-social relation was destroyed by suspicion and distrust between citizens, undermining any possibility of a dialogic relationship that makes possible the social sphere and the generalized dialogue. Drawing on Martin Buber's (1923) core theory, what is meaningful is the act through which the 'I' encounters and says 'Thou' to another; Neither the individual nor the community constitute the main unit of social relations, but the dialogical encounter between autonomous individuals who meet each other as a Thou, allowing each other to manifest their otherness and

uniqueness. This reciprocal opening reconstitutes the public sphere each time there is a living *I-Thou* relation between fellow citizens, making the generalised social dialogue possible. In his view, in its attempt to rebuild the social bonds which were ruptured by the Communist Dictatorship, the nascent Romanian democratic society has overlooked the pivotal link between final and instrumental, and the continuity between the ontological, metaphysical and the political. Freedom can only be achieved in a dialogical community, where both individual and political liberty is taken into consideration (Sora, 2007).

In order to further elucidate the rationale for this research project, I have so far provided a review of the seminal literature that has defined the concept of freedom in both Western and Eastern thought. Whist there is considerable overlap with regards to the transcendental aspect of the concept; the two traditions differ considerably in their understanding and articulation of the political. From the literature review freedom emerges as a multi-layered and multifaceted concept, and thus one needs to be able to produce meaningful discourse when claiming that someone or a specific group of people is 'free' (Grancea, 2010).

In the following section I aim to synthetize the key ideas from the previous sections by reiterating the rationale for the present paper.

2.9.   Rationale of the Current Research

My personal journey and my clinical work have made me realize that human freedom and choice are crucial aspects to the practice of existential psychotherapy and constitute a key ingredient for change. To some degree, the existential therapist's endeavour is always about extending the clients' understanding of their freedom and increasing their awareness of it. It is the recognition of the richness of human freedom and the incredible resilience that it conjures up that has spirited my research.

As shown in the literature review, contemporary political theories on freedom have surfaced within a history that has excluded certain groups and historical events, particularly the communist oppression of the Eastern European population. Although the radical revolutionary socialism of the 19th century led to the birth of the twin totalitarian regimes – Nazism and Communism –there is a sense that the latter has been less criminalized and condemned than the former, despite Communist regimes having produced more that 100 million deaths over two

generations. In spite of its political monstrosity and criminal violent past, Communism continues to fascinate and deeply divide the collective memory of Europe.

Winston Churchill (1946) referred to this phenomenon as the Iron Curtain that separates the Western and the Eastern camp in Europe, with the latter bearing the burden of oppression and freedom restriction. There is a gulf which separates eastern from western intellectuals, who have not experienced repression. On discussing the experience of totalitarianism in Communism in a 2010 interview, Romanian Nobel prize laureate Herta Muller (2010) boldly stated that the purely theoretical acquaintance of Western scholars with political repression '*hasn't helped them grasp even fractionally what the lack of freedom means.'*

The literature reviewed so far has shown many similarities in terms of how the Western and Eastern schools of thought conceptualize freedom ontologically. It seems that there is a lot of overlap between Jaspers, Frankl's focus on the noetic dimension and that of Eliade, Seshtov or Solzhenitsyn's. However, in terms of economical/political freedom and the oppression and their ontic manifestations in the historical, cultural and ideological context of Communist and post-Communist Romania, there seems to be more conceptual ambiguity. Whilst freedom as a philosophical, political and even economical term entered in the Western vocabulary along with the creation of the Cromwell state, in Eastern Europe 'modernity' started much later on (Grancea, 2009). Recent social science research studies (Blokker, 2005; Grancea, 2009) have pointed out the biases resulting from the huge background of Western based literature on the notion of freedom, thus attempting to challenge the underlying assumptions that freedom is universal in meaning and has the same connotations and denotations in Eastern and Western Europe for example.

The communist closure of the economic and public sphere and the blunt intrusion into the private realm of state subjects did not help Romanians to fully understand and live what 'modernity' was. Until 1989, the concept of 'freedom' was taboo. Communism marked the constitutional transformation of '*freedom to'* into '*duty to'* (Grancea, 2009).

As I mentioned earlier, the post 1989 transition period was marked by the same conceptual confusion with regards to the notion of freedom; recent research has shown that in spite of it being the key word during the bloody Revolution of December 1989, people couldn't really grasp the meaning of '*libertate*' and misinterpreted its significance. (Grancea, 2009; Tismăneanu, 1998).

Although existentialism is not concerned with political or sociological theorizing, many existential accounts of freedom have overlooked the socio-political context and the specificity of living in a carceral or post-communist society, as well as their impact on choice and responsibility within these demographical groups. My intention is to capture the complexity of the experience of freedom for the survivors of the Communist Labour Camps, as well as the challenges arising from trying to pin down the concept of freedom from a philosophical and theoretical point of view. It is my aim to give these people a voice which goes beyond the theoretical abstractions on freedom – without denying or glossing over the crude realities of political oppression.

2.9.1. Research Aim and Focus

The broad aim of my research is therefore to gain a better grasp of how people understand their freedom, as well as generate knowledge of the resources that individuals draw upon in order to sustain or persevere in their search for personal freedom and become resilient in the face of overwhelmingly distressing life circumstances (political detention/torture).

The phenomenon I am interested in is: what does freedom mean for the targeted research group? How has their experience of freedom changed with political incarceration? what strengthens the capacity of individuals to persevere amid the ravages of adversity? why is it that some individuals are resilient in the face of adversity, while others are defeated? What can be understood about the process of resilience in individuals who experience confrontation with what K. Jaspers called 'limit-situations'? What can we, as existential psychotherapists, learn about the experiences of trauma and hardships and the resources that engender freedom, hope and resilience?

As the nature of my research question is open-ended enquiry, I want to elicit rich descriptions of lived experience therefore I am using qualitative methodology. Research which uses methods which encourage and enable former political prisoners to describe their actual experience such as phenomenology will lead to a better understanding of their sense of freedom and oppression. As a result, the present research is aimed to be an existential-phenomenological exploration of the lived experience of freedom in former political prisoners of the Communist Romanian Gulag.

2.10.　Relevance to Counselling Psychology

Counselling Psychology, a formally recognized branch of Applied Psychology in the UK, can be viewed as relatively young profession. Its inception can be traced back to the 1970s, when psychologists with further training in counselling and psychotherapy created a special interest group in counselling psychology within the British Psychological Society (BPS) (Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2010). This group developed into the Section of Counselling Psychology in 1982, and it would be eventually granted full divisional status in 1994 (Orlans & Van Scoyoc, 2009).

Counselling psychology has been defined by the Division as '*strongly influenced by human science research as well as the principal psychotherapeutic traditions [which] draws upon'*, whose objective is '*to develop phenomenological models of practice and enquiry in addition to that of traditional scientific psychology. It continues to develop models of practice and research which marry the scientific demand for rigorous empirical enquiry with a firm value base grounded in the primacy of the counselling or psychotherapeutic relationship.'* (British Psychological Society, 2005)

The definition above captures the humanistic ethic and value base at the core of CoP (Strawbridge and Woolfe, 2010), its strong phenomenological tradition in the United Kingdom, as well as its pluralistic nature (Kasket, 2012); by embracing pluralism, CoP takes a stance which is sensitive to the uniqueness of individual experiences, and thus values a broad range of psychotherapeutic modalities and no particular one is superior to others, since people's experiences can be conceptualized in various ways by different modalities in order to facilitate therapeutic change (Cooper & McLeod, 2010).

The holistic perspective on the individual and the valuing of each person's uniqueness underpins CoP's recognition that psychotherapeutic work does not and cannot take place in a vacuum and translates into a focus on the subjective (and intersubjective) experience of individuals and recognizing their 'relational embeddedness' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Spinelli, 2005; Milton, 2010) This means that we can never be detached from the world since we are inescapably embedded in our environment, which continually impinges on our wellbeing.

This contextualized view of the individual acknowledges historical, economic, socio-cultural, political and ideological dimensions of the profession (Blair, 2009), which are included in CoP's sensitivity to diversity and rejection of the medical model as the 'ultimate truth' (Hemsley, 2013: p.20), thus focusing on individuals' strengths, resilience and possibilities rather than on their pathology. The Division's website definition of CoP's emphasizes its role

to '*work with the subjective psychological experience*' of individuals in order '*to empower their recovery.*' ('What is counselling psychology?" n.d., p. 1)

This commitment to equality and empowerment, which is embedded in CoP's humanistic values of social justice, anti-discriminatory practices and pluralism, has led scholars to suggest that the field should move away from the individual and shift its focus on the broader societal level (Kagan, Tindall and Robinson, 2010).

Whilst CoP has always attended to people in context and the effects of the social environment on behaviour, recent developments in the field have seen an increased preoccupation with social welfare, and social advocacy issues, particularly since social justice became core value at the National Conference of the Division of CoP in 2001.

2.10.1. Social Justice and Multiculturalism

Although social justice advocacy has been frequently linked with the multicultural – social justice movement in counselling (D'Andrea, 2006), generally presented under the umbrella of cross-cultural competences (Arredondo & Perez, 2006), some authors have emphasized the need for a clearer outline with regards to their points of divergence (Pieterse et al, 2009; Fouad et al., 2004; Goodman et al., 2004; Toporek et al, 2006).

Whilst multiculturalism focuses more broadly on acceptance and inclusion within the framework of societal diversity, social justice seems to have a narrower area on the specific issues of oppression and marginalization (Vera & Speight, 2003), and these two constructs cannot be used interchangeably, despite their areas of overlap. (Pietrese et al, 2009)

In recent years, there has been a notable drive for social justice to be recognized as 'the fifth force' in counselling psychology (Ratts et al, 2004) and for topics such as political ideology and oppression, principles of democracy, liberatory consciousness, peace education, economic systems of oppression, poverty to become main target areas for social justice training (Love, 2000; Aldarondo, 2007; Constantine et al, 2007).

Although different researchers focus on what different aspects of social justice work in the field of counselling psychology (Cutts, 2013) a widely cited definition has been offered by Goodman et al. (2004), who formulates it as: '*professional action designed to change societal values, structures, policies, and practices, such that disadvantaged or marginalized groups gain increased access to these tools of self-determination*' (2004, p. 795).

In line with this, one of the principal aims of advocacy in CoP is to answer to systemic inequalities that result in the silencing and marginalization of various groups of individuals (Vera & Speight, 2003). Since counsellors are often confronted with issues that cannot be resolved simply through change within the individual (Bradley and Lewis, 2001), an increasing number of scholars have pointed out to the need to establish and develop more social justice competencies in CoP training programs (Goodman et al., 2004; Kiselica & Robinson, 2001).

From a freedom perspective, social justice is akin to the concept of liberation in the Berlinian sense of 'freedom from', as it can help both clients and practitioners to become aware of the dynamics of oppression. An exploration of freedom through the lens of liberation psychologies can also be extremely valuable, since it reinforces the fact that perhaps there is not one universal way to define freedom, that only each individual, in each specific context and time, can really define this experience for themselves, if they so choose to; liberation psychologies also highlight the importance of a critical analysis of one's culture, especially in reference to oppression and privilege (Scarfe, 2015).

However, there have been also been voices from within the profession (Arredondo, Tovar-Blank, & Parham, 2008 ;Lichtenberg, 2017) that raised concerns about whether social justice should be a central aspect of the professional identity and practices of CoP, arguing that the increased focus on activism, social justice and human welfare matters can create divisiveness within the field, since counselling psychologists are not an ideologically and politically homogenous group and there can be disparities in their moral perspectives and responses to social matters: '…*we in counselling psychology are not immune to this conflict between moral absolutism and moral relativism'* (Lichtenberg, 2017, p.122).

What's more, critics have claimed that there is little research evidence supporting the benefits of a social justice infused counselling approach (Hunsaker, 2011; Smith et al., 2009) and warned against using psychology for political purposes, rather than focusing on enhancing CoP theory and practice (Hunsaker, 2011).

Whilst the above-mentioned contrasting views throw light on the controversial and politicized nature of the social welfare agenda, social justice has historically been one of the profession's core values and many scholars feel that it remains integral to the identity of counselling psychology.

Since one of the aims of the current paper is to give voice to a group that had been systematically oppressed under the totalitarian Communist regime for over 50 years, its social justice

component is aimed at the development of an awareness of systemic forces of oppression - a liberatory consciousness (Love, 2004) in a specific geo-political context. The general implications of this for the field of CoP could be that practitioners would become more aware of the complexities surrounding issues of political violence and oppression and attend to political, social, and economic forces in their conceptualizations of their clients' lived experience of distress, tailoring their interventions to diverse issues and sociocultural contexts. By becoming more aware of the dynamics of oppression and promoting and encouraging such actions as giving voice, raising awareness, sharing power, resilience building and providing the service users with the mechanisms for purporting social change (Goodman et al., 2004), practitioners can help the oppressed to act in an empowered manner and enhance their freedom and agency (Hanna et al., 2000).

In line with CoP guidelines for professional practice and core values, a relational and de-pathologizing understanding of the participants' unique lived experience was pivotal component of the rationale for the current research. It was equally central for me as a researcher to engage with a 'reflexive scientific attitude' (Gough & Madill, 2012: p.3) and review my subjectivity as a resource, in order to contextualize and enrich my research process and its findings – which I will be discussing in the section below.

2.11.   Reflexive Process

As someone who has lived under the Communism for 12 years and who was at the receiving end of family narratives about my grandad's imprisonment and the tortures and re-education programs that the prisoners were subjected to, I was aware that I entered the study as an 'insider' with a number of assumptions on the similarity between his experience and that of the participants' – which might or might not be there.

Finlay (2008b) posits that reflexivity is as much about identifying our biases and vantage point to our readers, as it is about being aware of how this could impact of the research process. In order to ensure the integrity of the research, it was particularly important to me to identify and transparently acknowledge these assumptions, as well as monitor their interference with the process of data collection and the analysis of my findings.

Although and important aspect of descriptive phenomenological research is that of epoche, which is the process of bracketing of presuppositions about the things that we are investigating

in order to uncover the essence of the phenomena, I am of the opinion that all research involves a reciprocity in which there is a 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer, 1989) of participant and researcher. In line with the existential phenomenological position of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, we can never truly bracket off all of our biases and achieve a 'God's eye view' due to our embeddedness in the world. As a result, by acknowledging the inherent subjectivity of research and continually reflecting on the relationship between myself and the participants and how this might have affected data collection and analysis, as well as the reporting of findings, I aim to enhance the rigour of my work and make it as transparent and coherent as possible. Langdridge (2007) states that research is always a process of compromise, given that '*knowledge doesn't exist in itself but is correlated with subjectivity and can only be claimed in the context of a subject apprehending the world*' (2007: p.155). Similarly, Yardley (2000) underlines the importance of being sensitive to the broader socio-cultural context of the study and considering how different ideological, historical and socio-economic elements interplay with the worldview of both participants and researchers.

In terms of how the above ideas apply to the current research, I needed to be mindful of how my positionality and who I was as a person (shaped by the socio-economic and political environment) impacted on the research process (Palaganas et al., 2017). For instance, I was aware that I entered this study as an 'insider', since I share the same nationality and language with my participants. However, in terms of historical, ideological and socio-economic influences, although my parents and grandparents have been directly oppressed by the Communist Dictatorship, I was 12 when the Revolution took place and I couldn't predict the extent to which this difference my might have impacted on our relationship or impact my ability to reliably reflect what my participants were reporting. I had also moved to Rome, Italy when I was 24, therefore I had been shaped by different cultural environments over the years and I could have been perceived as privileged or 'removed' from the realities of the Romanian *modus vivendi*. I was also mindful of the significant age gap between me and my participants, as well as how my gender might have facilitated or limited the way in which they storied themselves.

As I stated earlier, the above arguments were not seen as undermining the work, but instead reflexively significant as I become aware of my own input into the construction of meanings and of lived experiences in the research process, as well as my investment in the research analysis.

In practical terms, keeping a reflexive journal has been an invaluable tool for me ever since 2015 when I started thinking about researching this topic. This allowed me to capture my

responses to the participants' material as they emerged, as well as engage with my own thought process and emerging feelings in different stages of the research.

Recording my journey using a heuristic enquiry framework has been a meaningful process, both personally and as researcher. The biographical narrative was an opportunity for me to critically consider my research aims and to question my own lens, how my own views may be influential on my research findings, transparently acknowledging the subjective of research. Moustakas (1990) views heuristic inquiry as an attempt to discover the meaning and nature of phenomenon through internal pathways of self, leading to increased awareness of the uniqueness and depths of our own story and enabling one to see things in different ways and achieve new insights into the phenomenon studied.

Writing down my own story and my grandfather's story in a heuristic manner also led to increased reflexivity through comparing these narratives with the ones of the participants. The aim of the above was to stay close to the experiential accounts of my participants whilst attending to my own potential interfering narratives and biases and making them explicit. This was done in Romanian, for parity with the stories collected from the participants. My reflexive process will be further expanded on when I discuss data analysis and findings at a later stage, as well as other emerging methodological and ethical concerns, so that I honour all those involved in this research project.

Having outlined in the previous sections the relevance of my study for the field of CoP, as well its rationale and the associated existing literature, the following chapter will present my epistemological position as researcher and describe how this informed my choice of research method.

3. *Methodology*

3.1. Overview

Willig (2013) emphasizes that it is the research topic itself that determines the research design, and not the other way round; it is therefore of essence to identify the kind of knowledge one aims to produce accurately and chose a research methodology that is going to help them achieve their objective.

The aim of qualitative research is to provide a detailed description of events or experiences, paying attention to their richness, texture and quality without any pre-defined variables which the participants' experience is measured against. Given the very topic of my research, my intention was to stay open and curious to whatever was revealed in the research process and not make any hypotheses or predictions in relation to its outcome.

Methodology differs from the method in that it provides a general approach to studying a particular research topic, whereas the method refers to a specific research technique (Silverman, 2005).

The field of psychology in general and counselling psychology in particular has been long dominated by positivist paradigms and closely affiliated with quantitative research methods (Ponterotto, 2005). However, recently the paradigmatic base has been broadened as researchers began to focus more on exploring and understanding lived experience rather than attending to issues of causality (Willig, 2008). In terms of the current research, my aim was to elicit and critically analyse rich in-depth personal narratives; as such, a quantitative methodology that was concerned with discovering empirical evidence and measurements would have not been a good fit since my study is mainly concerned with the subjective meaning of the ex-political prisoners experience of the Communist Regime, rather than obtaining a set of variables which would have statistical significance and generalize to the whole population. This would subscribe more to a positivist paradigm, which postulates the belief in a real world that one can gain knowledge about by means of a scientific framework, inclusive of statistical quantification.

By contrast, the use of a phenomenological method would have an epistemological focus on experience or narrative, rather than an objective knowable world, therefore requiring methods that are subjective and involved. According to van Manen (1990), the aim of a

phenomenological approach to qualitative research is to capture and accurately describe the lived experiences of individuals, rather than that of generating theories or models of the phenomenon under investigation. Since the current study is interested in the subjective experiences and understanding of freedom of a specific group rather than in discovering 'what is really going on', the type of knowledge that I was aiming to obtain is phenomenological – that is, knowledge of the quality and texture of the experience itself. (Willig, 2013: p.72). As a result, I decided that the use of a qualitative methodology rooted in phenomenology would be the best fit for this research project.

3.2.   Phenomenological Method

Phenomenological approaches range from descriptive to interpretative varieties, depending on whether researchers' focus on the mere description of experience, or their attempt to understand more about its underlying meaning.

Descriptive phenomenological research relies on Husserl's eidetic reduction method and aims of obtaining knowledge through bracketing one's biases and assumptions of the essential constituents of the phenomenon and identifying it '*precisely as it presents itself*' (Giorgi, 1985; Giorgi and Giorgi, 2003). However, some researchers have been dissatisfied with this tenet, arguing that in order to understand the experiences of the Lifeworld we need to be much more interpretative and make use of a particular hermeneutic or method of interpretation.

 For Willig (2013), the nature of qualitative research is fundamentally interpretative in that '*qualitative data never speaks for itself – it needs to be read through a particular lens which gives it (a particular) meaning*'. As such, we need to keep in mind that a 'purist' description is unattainable (Finlay, 2008a) and our interpretations and findings are tentative and subject to change. This is the tenet on which hermeneutic phenomenology rests.

3.3.   Hermeneutic Phenomenology

The move from descriptive to interpretive phenomenology is usually described as the '*hermeneutic turn*' and it is attributed to Heidegger (1962), who was the first to argue that scientific cognition is both preceded by and derived from our Being-in-the-world, making it virtually impossible to discard any of our pre-acquired knowledge. With this re-conception of

philosophy, he challenges the priority of epistemology and reinstates the primacy of ontology, by considering man in all the modes of his everyday activities as an interpreting meaning making entity, rather than confining human understanding and interpretation to the narrow methodology of the human sciences. His philosophical stance is that our only means to access lived experience is through interpretation. At the core of this philosophical stance is the idea that we are embodied beings who exist contextually – spatially, temporally, historically and culturally – and our existence cannot be conceptualised outside of these parameters. For Heidegger, we are irretrievably thrown into existence and intertwined with *all-of-what-is*, not essentially separated. In elaborating his philosophical position, Heidegger expanded the ontological dimension of both phenomenology and hermeneutics.

Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) built on his insights and conceptualisation of human existence as 'Being-in-the-world' and further explored the interlink between understanding, experience and language. For Gadamer, our understanding is determined by our pre-judgements and is limited, since it occurs within a certain horizon. However, our horizons of understanding are not static, but constantly in motion and the way we attain mutual understanding is through a *fusion of horizons*, whereby we acknowledge consensus in our worldviews.

In his major work 'Truth and Method' ([1975], 1989) he points out that the scientific method does not produce what is generally understood by the idea of 'truth' and proposes a different kind of understanding which essentially emerges from language. In his view, language is 'the house of Being' as it brings selfhood and humanity into existence as it is infused with man's *thrownness*:

'*Language is not just one of man's possessions in the world; rather, on it depends the fact that man has a world at all. The world as world exists for man as for no other creature that is in the world. But this world is verbal in nature.*' (Truth and Method, 1989: p. 443)

The idea that all interpretative understanding comes from language is also reflected in the work of Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), whose influential work draws on the ideas of the former two. Just like Heidegger and Gadamer, Ricoeur sees human beings as '*meaning- makers, thrown into a world where all possibilities are already experienced interpretations',* and are operating in and through language (Langdridge, 2007, p.54).

Ricoeur makes a critical distinction between *language* and *discourse*, which has important implications for hermeneutical phenomenology. If language is the system of signs that constitute a discourse, the latter represents the creative construction of human agents, which

can only be revealed when we are engaged in dialogue with another. Given the inherent similarity between human action and text, Ricoeur radically argues that all human action should be reconceptualised as text, as this enables researchers to employ techniques from hermeneutic phenomenology (Langdridge, 2007).

Unlike Gadamer, Ricoeur posits that a text needs to be understood phenomenologically, at face value, and hermeneutically, through interpretation. In his view both empathy and suspicion are necessary for the appropriation of meaning.

The growing   interest in hermeneutics has also seen an upsurge in the development and use of phenomenological narrative research methods, which were chosen for the present project for reasons that I will explain in more detail when I discuss and justify my choice of methods (Langdridge, 2007).

The assumption of an epistemological position on how the researcher comes to know and make sense of reality also determines one's situatedness vis-a-vis their participants, as well as the manner in which the quality of methods is demonstrated (Carter & Little, 2007).

In the sections below I will be outlining the paradigmatic choices made within this piece of research and attempt to explain their alignment with my research question, choice of data collection and analysis.

3.3.1. Paradigm

Ponterotto (2005) defines a paradigm as a *'set of interrelated assumptions about the social world which provides a philosophical and conceptual framework for the organized study of that world'*. In line with this, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) call this '*the net that contains the researcher's epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises*' (p. 22). In other words, a paradigm constitutes the philosophical system embraced by the researcher, having a significant impact on the direction of research as it attempts to answer the following questions:

Ontology:	What is reality? What can be we know about it?

Epistemology:	How do we know? How can reality be accessed and investigated in the research process?

Methodology:	What are the optimal methods to use in order to generate answers to the questions posed, being mindful of the epistemological and ontological

stances of the researcher?

Lincoln and Guba (2005) have pointed out to the increasing paradigmatic fluidity of qualitative methodologies. This statement applies to the current research, since it draws on both post-positivist and social constructionist paradigms.

Whilst a positivist paradigm is congruent with the idea that there's one true reality that is understandable, identifiable, and measurable, post-positivists also accept a true reality, but they believe it can only be measured imperfectly and probabilistically apprehended (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

According to Willig (2008), it is the research topic that determines the research methodology that will generate the type of knowledge we aim to produce. In line with an existential phenomenological approach, this project sees the participants' accounts as subjective and interpreted and accepts that their stories are embedded in their worldview and the context they inhabited; as such it embraces the hermeneutic phenomenological stance.

Therefore, it is not my aim to position this debate as a binary positivist vs post-positivist one or suggest that these are incompatible, but to point out to what was appropriate for the aims of my project and the phenomenological philosophy underpinning it.

Whilst my research reflects this belief in an independent reality, it does not embrace the positivist tenet according to which the researcher remains objective, detached and value free in the research process. From an epistemic-axiological perspective, my positioning is more aligned with a constructionist paradigm, working on the idea that the role of the researcher is that of a *bricoleur* (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000), an active participant in the co-construction of knowledge rather than a mere observer in search of an absolute truth – skilfully employing data collection methods to let the voices of the researched speak, their values sitting at the core of the research process (Langdridge, 2007).

3.3.2.   Ontological Position

As a result, the ontological stance of this research can be defined as critical realism. According to this position, the existence of an independent, external, reality is not negated, but it claims that the frailty of human senses and the interpretive nature of observation can lead to an inaccurate perception of that reality (Blaikie, 2007). We are contextually situated in the world, and we cannot divorce ourselves from that.

Critical realist research works on the premise that we cannot access an objective image of reality, since this is permanently mediated by the very act of interpreting it, thus differentiating 'the essence of things from their appearance' (Losch, 2009: p. 86). Critical realists posit that is possible for social science to refine its knowledge about the real world and make claims about reality which are relatively justified, while still being historical, contingent, and changing. Pivotal to a critical realist position is the view that social reality has a relatively autonomous existence, but our knowledge about that reality is always historically, socially, and culturally situated. The critical dimension of this lens provides an intersection between realist ontology and a constructivist epistemology, which is congruent with the aims of this study.

The present research departs from the presupposition that the phenomena of 'freedom'/'oppression' are real phenomena and exist 'out there' in the social world, but also that each participant in the study experienced them through their own subjective lens.

There is an underpinning belief that there is no way of knowing the world except under particular, more or less historical transient, perspectival descriptions (Archer et al., 2016) and that we cannot claim privileged access to objective reality since knowledge is articulated from various standpoints according to various influences and interests and is both concept and context bound. In other words, I assume that the narrative accounts gathered in the interview context might differ from the stories narrated at different times or under different circumstances and do not represent static instances of those experiences.

In line with the paradigmatic and ontological positioning of the present study, as well as the research questions and its aims, I would describe the epistemology of my research as contextual constructionism. This translates into an ontological position according to which 'we come to know external reality through our constructs, even though an outer reality exists' (Raskin, 2008: p. 8).

3.3.3.   Epistemological Position

According to Dillon and Wals (2006) explicitly engaging with epistemological and ontological aspects of the research process is foundational to the inquiry, as it allows for the clarification of one's position on the fundamental issues such as power, values and truth and as such shapes the study's methodology.

The type of knowledge that my research aims to produce is phenomenological, in that I focus on the participants' lived experience and the stories that they tell of their experiences. The experiential accounts of participants are implicitly subjective and interpreted, informed by their worldview and the contexts that they inhabit, and my research embraces a hermeneutic phenomenological stance as a result. My epistemological position therefore acknowledges this inherent subjectivity that is present in the process of understanding and meaning-making and giving.

Central to contextual constructivism is the fact that knowledge is negotiated and invented out of ideas and assumptions made available by the social and interpersonal context, therefore any given phenomenon can be understood through different narratives of the same experience (Willig, 2008). Moreover, the dynamic dialogic interaction between researcher and participant is central to capturing and describing the lived experience of the latter. This perspective also implies that knowledge can be generated through the relationship between the language featured in the experiential accounts of the participants and the context within which they are generated (Willig, 2008), making it a good fit for narrative research. In other words, language and 'reality' are reflexively linked: 'language simultaneously reflects reality and constructs it to be a certain way' (Gee, 2005: p. 97).

In line with the epistemological stance outlined above, I decided that critical narrative analysis (CNA) was most fitting method of analysis for this study. In the following sections I will elaborate on the features of CNA as a research method and explain my consideration of alternative methods before making a final decision.

3.4.   Narrative Research

Narrative inquiry draws its roots from phenomenological psychology, and it refers to a subset of qualitative research designs in which stories are used to describe human action. (Polkinghorne, 2006). Narrative inquiry is 'stories lived and told' (Clandinin and Connolly, 2000: p. 20), within a given time and space. In the context of narrative inquiry, *narrative* refers to a discourse form in which events and happenings are configured into a temporal unity by means of a plot (Polkinghorne, 2006: p. 1).

As a result, narrative involves hermeneutics in order to understand the process of meaning making - that is, how people put together aspects of their life and the social world and make

sense of their life experiences.

Jerome Bruner (1986) posits that we access knowledge in different ways and differentiates between two distinct forms of thought: the 'paradigmatic', which is logico-scientific and operates by categorization, and the 'narrative', which combines disparate elements into an emplotted story. Sarbin (1986) argued that 'narrative' is a root metaphor for psychology that should replace the mechanistic and organic metaphors which shaped so much theory and research in social sciences over the past century. Hyvärinen (2006) draws attention to the elusiveness of the term 'narrative' in the field of psychology, conceptualizing it as powerful metaphor for understanding life, since we came into existence into an already 'storied world' and the construction and exchange of stories is central to human experience. Schiff (2006) sees 'narrative' as a dynamic process, focusing on the verb 'to narrate' rather than the noun 'narrative'. To him, narrating discloses experience by 'making present'. It is through storytelling that we imbue our lives with meaning, through expressive action which unfolds in time and space.

3.4.1.   Rationale for Narrative Analysis

One of NA's fundamental tenets is that people use stories to make sense of themselves and their world, as well as vehicles through which they make themselves known to others (Sarbin, 1986). NA was particularly appealing to me from the start due to its focus on how individuals create and use stories to better understand their world and also the viewing of narratives as products of a specific social, historical and cultural context, over a long stretch of time. Narrative analyses are also concerned with revealing the discontinuities between stories and experience focusing on discourse and on the 'telling themselves' and the devices that individuals use to make sense of their stories.

It follows that the aim of narrative research is to produce knowledge about how meaning is fulfilled on temporal and spatial coordinates, turning toward the everyday circumstances in which life experience is made present and linking its observations to human lives in context. Its particular attention to how people construct meaning in their lives and its sensitivity to the chronotope dimension (Bahktin, 1981) weighed in favour of my choosing narrative inquiry over other approaches rooted in interpretive phenomenology. By focusing on narrative, I was able to investigate not only the way in which the stories were structured, but also who produced them and by what means, as well as how these narratives were silenced, contested or accepted.

(Andrews et al., 2013). These aspects helped me describe and better understand different aspects of my participants' lifeworld.

When carrying out narrative analysis, there are no uniform procedures as such, and different methods have their advantages and disadvantages; I used my research question to direct me in making a decision about what approach to use.

The inclusion of the subjectivity of the interviewer as well as the participant has led to the development of critical approaches (Emerson & Frosh, 2004); Having examined several methods of analysis including Hiles et.al (2009), Frank's (2012) dialogical narrative analysis and McAdam's (1993) life stories narrative analysis, Ricoeur' s (1984) narrative theory has led to the development of a phenomenologically inspired narrative analytic method (Langdridge, 2007) which I opted for in the current research for reasons I will be outlining below.

Whilst there are shared commonalities between his approach and alternative methods of narrative analysis (such as those of McAdams, Polkinghorne or Murray's), there are also important differences, such as the emphasis on rhetorical function, tone and thematic content and the introduction of a 'critical moment' where the researcher destabilizes the narrative by employing the imaginative hermeneutics of suspicion. The aim of CNA is to synthesise of a variety of analytic tools in order to enable the researcher to work critically with the data and to shed light on the phenomenon under investigation (Langdridge, 2007).

CNA is remarkably close to my philosophical and epistemological stance as I am interested in researching the narratives of lived experience of freedom/ oppression of my participants over a long stretch of time. My research interest is also concerned with the narrative identities of my participants and how their stories of freedom or oppression might compare to a dominant counter-narrative. According to Langdridge (2011), CNA is a particularly suitable for researchers interested in conducting work on topics which are clearly and directly inflected with issues of power and politics. Ricoeur (1996) argues that one can never escape ideology and as a result the politically inflected nature of all experience needs to be critically examined across different axes of power.

A fundamental distinguishing characteristic of Langdridge's narrative analysis compared to other methods is the inclusion of a critical moment, where an attempt is made to interrogate the text using a hermeneutic of suspicion - a perspectival shift, to offer an alternative angle on the phenomenon, specifically one which is grounded in broader sociocultural discourse (Langdridge, 2007). The move is from a focus on the lifeworld of the person and their meanings

to a critical analysis of the narrative world that equally facilitates and limits the person's ways of speaking about their world. The next section explains this analytic method in more detail.

3.5. Critical Narrative Analysis

In developing his critical narrative analysis model Langdridge (2007) built primarily on the work of the hermeneutic philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005). In his philosophical writings Ricoeur argues for the inexorable historicity of all understanding, as well as our embeddedness in the social world and language. Ricoeur (1991) seeks to provide a framework for reading text which is rooted in phenomenology, whilst also engaging with hermeneutics, stating that 'life is in search of a narrative". In his perspective, our identities are formed through the stories we tell of ourselves and as such people and their lives can be read and interpreted as texts.

Ricoeur (1984) posits that in narrative new meaning emerges through the synthesis of disparate elements into a coherent unit. He argues that stories are made in order to better comprehend lived experience through the organization of disparate fragments into meaningful wholes.

At the core of Ricoeur's understanding of narrative identity is the distinction between *ipse* and *idem*, which stand for 'the self' and 'the same' (1992: *p. 117-8*). The first one refers to the fluidity and alterity of one's actions depending on need, context or aims, whereas the latter refers to the sameness and unity of experience as the alone protagonists of our stories. For the French philosopher, the creation of our narrative identities is a process without end (Ricoeur, 1988). In *Oneself as Another*, he suggests that the narrative construction of a sense of oneself (or selves) is an interweaving of these two identity modes, pointing out towards competing, overlapping, subsuming multitude of narrative voices that are gathered together by identity work, rather than coherent autobiographies of one's life (Mallet & Wapshott, 2011).

Ricoeur's view is that the creation of meaning intrinsic to humanity can only be grasped through the analysis of metaphor and narrative – which considers reliable paths into the creative process in action. The French philosopher states that a reconceptualization of human action as text enables better understanding and interpretation, as one becomes able to employ techniques from hermeneutic phenomenology (Langdridge, 2007).

Narratives call the subject into being and serve to situate its experience in time. For Ricoeur, every narrative is concerned with this situating and the narrative competence turns time into human time when it is experienced or told as a narrative (Kemp 1996; Ricoeur,1980).

3.5.1.   Consideration of Alternative Methods

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

One advantage of studying the issues of freedom and oppression with a hermeneutical phenomenological approach is that we are able to reveal the patterning of meanings and experiences across participants while privileging the unique characteristics of each research participant. Methods drawing on hermeneutic phenomenology are idiographic and inductive and tend to pay close attention to each case and are focussed on the specific rather than the general.

Both IPA and Van Manen's HP draw on Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology ([1927] 1962), which is concerned with interpretation designed to grasp the understanding of a research participant. Ricoeur (1970) terms this the *hermeneutics of empathy* or *meaning-recollection*. Unlike CNA however, existential phenomenology does not incorporate what Ricoeur (1970) termed the *hermeneutics of suspicion*. This mode of interpretation seeks to understand by peeling back the layers of meaning – digging beneath the surface for what is hidden and implicit– which may lead to suspicion over the initial empathic account of meaning.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, as devised by Smith in the mid-1990s, is a method that draws upon hermeneutic phenomenology, as stated above, and which interpretively attends to the lived world of a small typically homogeneous sample of participants and the commonalities of their particular lived experience.

IPA was considered as a method for this study due to its focus on individuals' lived experiences and their meaning making process. The approach is also interpretative as meaning is co-constructed through the researcher and participant's interactions, as well as in the process of working through and responding to the transcripts – the double hermeneutic.

Whilst I am very interested in the experience of a specific life event by a small group of participants in order to identify, describe and interpret emerging commonalities and existential themes, my focus is on making sense of the life narratives and the context within which the participants lived over a long period of time, rather than on their lived experience in a specific

moment. Since my aim was to uncover life stories that stretched over years of incarceration, I felt that IPA did not fit with my aims and eventually concluded that CNA was the method most aligned with this study.

Interpretive Phenomenology

The hermeneutic (interpretivist) method of van Manen (1990), like many phenomenological methods, is heuristic and follows Gadamer ([1991), with his focus on how language reveals being within particular historical and cultural contexts, understood through a fusion of horizons (here of participant and researcher – through the language of the interview) moving in a circular fashion (the *hermeneutic circle*) between part and whole, with no beginning or end.

Considering my research setting and the particular group represented, I believe an IP investigation could be especially informative and would be of much interest. However, in terms of my research focus, IP was rejected due to its lack of focus the temporal situatedness of the participant's experience, given that their personal narratives covered long periods of time.

Grounded Theory

In terms of their history and the philosophy that underpins different approaches, Grounded Theory, developed by Glasser & Strauss (1967), originates from sociology, specifically symbolic interactionism – which argues that meaning is understood through interactions with others in social processes (Jeon, 2004). Its goal is to develop an explanatory theory of basic social processes (Glasser and Strauss, 1967), positing that theory is discovered by examining concepts grounded in the data. The very title of Strauss and Glasser's seminal work 'The Discovery of Grounded Theory 'implies that there is some objective, external world to be discovered; for this reason, classical GT has been associated with objectivism (Charmaz, 2006).

I have decided against this method as my aim is not to develop an explanatory theory of basic social processes, studied in the environment where they took place (Glasser and Strauss, 1967) but rather to give voice and validity to the experience of a minority (ex-political prisoners of the Romanian communist Gulag), underpinned by an existential phenomenological perspective.

In contrast with the Straussian and Glasserian view, Charmaz's (2000) recent development of Constructive Grounded Theory (ConGT) brings it closer to a phenomenological view by

recognizing that there is an interpretative process going on when accounting for the realities observed in the empirical world. Her approach is grounded in constructivism– she therefore changes the original philosophy to 'theory is created/constructed by examining concepts grounded in the data'.

Being an idiographic study, my research is not focused on uncovering social processes or developing low/middle range theory. Also known as a 'sociology of gerunds' (Charmaz, 2006), ConGT advocates the use of a particular type of research question, that is more concerned with processes and their influencing factors, or how structures are created through people's actions.

So, while I concluded that this was not what I was seeking to do and rather to stay closer to the particular narrative accounts of my participants, the findings from my study could perhaps lead to ConGT research. It could be interesting, for instance, to later expand on the current research in order to generate a psychological theory on freedom by building on the subjective experiences of former political prisoners obtained as result of this study.

Structural Existential Analysis

Developed by van Deurzen since 1988, SEA constitutes both a basis for existential therapy and phenomenological research method for counselling psychology. The method provides a systematic analysis of phenomenological work on different layers involving the three reductions (phenomenological/eidetic/transcendental), dialogical and hermeneutic interviewing, working with bias, the four world's model, working with timelines and the emotional compass.

This method appealed to me from the start, as it is congruent with my epistemological stance, and it overlaps significantly with my existential counselling practice in terms of the structural phenomenological steps in analysis. I was particularly drawn to the four-world model and its paradoxes and the use of the emotional compass. In my view, van Deurzen's (1984) four-dimensional force field offers a solid, yet fluid framework for conceptualising freedom/oppression, in that it captures the multi-faceted and complex nature of human experience and how this can emerge and manifest itself on different levels.

Another valuable aspect that is relevant to my research project is the importance given to timelines (Heiddegger's ek-stasies) in the participant's experience. As my aim is to investigate how my participant's sense of freedom changed before, during and after incarceration – a

research lens that is sensitive to temporality makes it a great candidate for my topic.

According to Van Deurzen, SEA typically works best with a single case study since its focus is not so much about identifying commonalities as it is to provide an in-depth analysis of a life experience (Van Deurzen, 2015). However, this is also true for Langdridge's methods, and it didn't constitute the motif that I rejected it in favour of the latter. The reason why I ultimately chose CNA over this method was its specific focus on narrative and its explicit inclusion of a critical moment which facilitates a perspectival shift that is grounded in broader socio-cultural discourse, which is most aligned with my research and rationale.

3.5.2.   Rationale for Critical Narrative Analysis

To summarize, having outlined my epistemological position and considered all the alternative research methods mentioned above, I identified CNA as the most appropriate tool for analysis of the interview data as it offered a detailed investigation of a small number of research subjects whose processes of accounting and making sense of their experience is seen of intrinsic interest (not a source of generalization), as well as a strong emphasis on understanding the life stories presented by the participants. However, unlike some of the other idiographic and inductive qualitative research methods I considered, CNA enabled a move from the focus on the life stories of the participants and their associated meanings to a critical analysis of the narrative world in which they are embedded and an engagement with broader socio-political concerns, which I considered a central aspect of my research. Narrative analysis is a methodology which is especially sensitive to subjective meaning making and its interpenetration with the social contexts and processes in the construction of individual stories.

As a result, the use of CNA enabled me to ask particular questions about particular lives, such as how former political prisoners made sense of their freedom or lack of, and how they saw their sense of self, others and relationships. CNA's particular attention to the temporal dimension also enabled me to explore if and how my participants' sense of freedom changed over time. Last but not least, I decided to opt for CNA due to its inclusion of a critical moment, which allowed me to examine the interplay of my participants' personal narratives and the canonical cultural discourses and the frameworks of dominant narratives.

Provided that the Romanian Communist past has become a battleground between the elite's narrative of Communism as cultural trauma and the popular narrative of Communism as a better

alternative to the current society, I was particularly interested in the extent to which the canonical narrative was resisted by the personal narratives of the participants. The inclusion of a critical moment and a hermeneutic of suspicion enabled me to explore the potential hermeneutic mismatch and narrative incongruity mentioned above, and to engage with broader socio-political issues.

To conclude, along with offering a rigorous way of working with narratives, CNA's valuing of each individual speaker's narrative, its embeddedness in the world of language, as well as its close attention to social construction of subjectivities in relation to dominant discourses and the strong emphasis on the political/value dimension made me identify it as the most appropriate research method for this project.

Having outlined the decision process involved in selecting CNA as my research method of choice for this study, I will now describe the data collection and the systematic stages of analysis, including the sampling and recruitment and the interview design. My aim in the following sections is to show how the review of literature, my epistemological vantage point and the ethical issues described above have informed how my research design, data collection and reporting.

3.6.   Method of Data Collection

In this section, I start by providing an outline of the sampling and recruitment processes, followed by a presentation of the interview design, piloting and data analysis; last but not least I will discuss the methodological challenges encountered in this process.

3.6.1.   Recruitment process

My sampling for this study was *purposive* and *homogeneous*. My aim was to recruit participants who shared the experience at the heart of the investigation (political incarceration) and, if possible, did not vary significantly across demographic characteristics. My intention was not to generalize beyond this particular sample, but to develop detailed descriptions of the narratives of a small number of people who all shared that experience of incarceration under the Communist Regime – as such this was an idiographic study. Qualitative research is primarily interested in an in-depth analysis of a limited number of accounts; however, CNA is perhaps

suited to an even smaller number, when taking into account the complexity of the analytical method and the scope of a particular study (Langdridge, 2007).

In terms of inclusion criteria, I wanted to target all socio-economic classes, professions and both genders. Gender sensitive research pays attention to the similarities and the differences between men and women's experiences and viewpoints; and gives equal value to each. Despite aiming to engender my research and ensure an equitable representation and participation of men and women in order to offer a richer, more diverse picture of the phenomenon, only male participants contacted me. I therefore opted for a homogenous group.

The BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (2013) stipulates that the process of recruitment should consider the health and wellbeing of participants, reflect respect for the dignity and integrity of persons, and thoroughly apply criteria for the inclusion/exclusion of research participants.

As far as the current study is concerned, prospective participants that presented with severe cognitive, language or communication impairments were excluded from the study, since that could have affected their ability to comprehend the nature and purpose of the research, provide valid consent and fully engage with the interviewing process. This was informally assessed during a preliminary telephone screening interview.

Whilst my aim was to make sure that the participants were protected from potential discomfort and harm in line with the ethical principles of my professional code, I decided against using post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as an exclusion criterion in order to facilitate recruitment of the participants who may have been able to manage well. Although I took into account the possibility that some of some participants might have displayed some of the symptoms consistent this particular diagnostic category, I also acknowledged that the medicalization of the participant's political and existential suffering could have been invalidating and decontextualizing their experiences, to the extent that the researcher might risk contributing to the efforts of their persecutors. Since the purpose of torture under the Communist regime was to intimidate individuals in respect of their capacity to assert themselves politically and culturally, I concluded that using PTSD as an exclusion criterion and approaching their experiences from a medical stance would have risked undermining their very struggle for freedom and the research's aim to give a voice to this marginalized sub-group.

A recruitment flyer was created in order to attract research participants that met the criteria outlined by my study. In light of the sensitive nature of my research topic, I had to bear in mind

that I was essentially asking participants to come forward on the basis of their identification as 'ex political prisoners'; and was mindful of the impact that this might have had on prospective participants. As a result, I didn't include words like 'suffer' or 'labour camps' in the target question. For an example of the recruitment poster, please refer to the Appendix Section.

Once finalized, I distributed the flyer with the recruitment information to charities and national agencies (The Romanian Association of Ex Political Prisoners, the National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism) and asked them to distribute it on their websites or in their newsletter. I also liaised with fellow psychotherapists or university colleagues in Bucharest, as well as acquaintances and friends, asking them to place the flyer on university boards or health centres. In addition, I capitalized on the use of my own social networks by advertising my research via social media platforms and inviting prospective participants to contact me via private messaging.

Once they expressed an interest, I contacted potential participants via telephone. The pre-interview discussion allowed me to provide the participants with a brief outline of my study assess their suitability for this research and discuss issues related to fees, location and time of the interview.

In line with the aims of this study, six male participants were recruited. This sample size allowed for a detailed analysis of each narrative account, as well as the identification of potential commonalities across different accounts. Participants were aged between 80-92 and were all of Romanian origin.

3.6.2. Interviewing

Suitable participants were invited to take part in a semi-structured interview in order to explore and discuss their experiences. The interviews were conducted at two neutral locations (Bucharest and Constanta); the rooms were placed within well-staffed and safe buildings (The Zodiac Business Centre, Mamaia Boulevard, Constanta and the Aquamarin Mental Health Clinic, 6 Decebal Boulevard, Bucharest, 030966, Romania respectively). Interviews were conducted during regular hours and at a time where several members of staff were in the buildings.

The interviews were conducted in Romanian, recorded digitally and transcribed by me personally. Data will be kept confidential under password protection on my personal computer and will be deleted once my dissertation is marked.

Given that the interview would have elicited some painful memories/ feelings, it was made sure that the participants were able to discuss these in a confidential setting, following the interviewing process. They were given a debriefing letter including the name of a therapist, should they have wished to seek further support at a later time. All identifying information was disguised, including names, occupations and backgrounds. The participants' consent was sought in order to use extracts from the interview in this paper.

Finlay (2008a) encourages researchers to cultivate a phenomenological attitude of wonder and openness, whereby they attempt bracket their own assumptions and hold open possibilities in order to see the participants' worlds with fresh eyes. Throughout the interview process, I aimed to be open to the co-researchers lifeworld and allow their narratives to unravel, providing them with the space they needed. In line with Langdridge's (2007) suggestion, interruptions were kept to a minimum unless the participant steered off completely, in which case I gently intervened**.**

Interviews began by making the participants aware that there are no correct or incorrect answers and inviting them to tell their stories in whichever way they thought fit. I opted for semi-structured interviews since my interest did have the specific focus of freedom, despite wanting to openly explore the life-world; as a result, the data gathered attempted to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What was your experience of being free before being incarcerated?

2. How did you experience your sense of freedom whist you were imprisoned?

3. What helped you cope with freedom restriction when you were incarcerated?

4. What is your experience of freedom when you came out of the labour camp?

5. How has imprisonment changed your understanding of freedom?

6. What are your views on the Communist past and legacy now, twenty-eight years after the collapse of the Communist regime?

The last question was added in order to critically question the participants in relation to their views on the Communist Era and whether this has changed in the twenty-eight years that followed the 1989 Romanian revolution. Given the narrative incongruity that exists in Romania

with regards to the Communist past and the battleground between the elite's narrative of Communism as cultural trauma and the popular discourse of Communism as a better alternative to the current society, I thought it would be particularly relevant if one of my interview questions targeted this specific hermeneutic mismatch between the dominant and the counter narratives.

The prompts and questions were asked phenomenologically, from a place of curiosity and genuine interest. Throughout the interviews, my aim was to stay present to the participants' stories rather than rigidly follow a predetermined structure. Following Mishler's (1991) suggestion, I conceptualized my questions '*as part of a circular process through which its meaning and that of its answer are created in the discourse between interviewer and respondent as they try to make continuing sense of what they are saying to each other*' (1991: p.70).

3.6.3.   The Process of Critical Narrative Analysis

Langdridge's model includes six stages, but he warns against treating these as 'discrete' and emphasizes the circular and iterative nature of the model in his diagrammatic formulation (Figure 1 below).
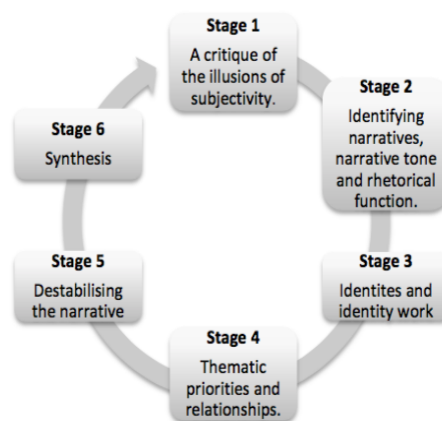
Figure 1. Critical narrative analysis (CNA) – working the hermeneutic circle (Langdridge, 2007, p.134)

Stage 1, which is called 'A critique of the illusions of subjectivity', implied reflexive engagement on my side as a researcher with regards to what the topic meant to me personally. As prompted by Langdridge's suggestions, I considered how my background and subjective

experiences might have influenced the questions being asked and the data that I helped produce (Langdridge, 2007). This process helped me become more aware of my own biases about the research topic and critique these, since we always have a view from somewhere within ideological structures (Ricoeur, 1965). With this in mind, I attempted to delineate the horizons of my world with regards to the topic at hand by reading through the transcripts, listening to the interviews several times and writing summaries of my impressions as the narratives unfolded.

Stage 2 of the model involved identifying distinct narratives within the texts, as well as delineating their tone and rhetorical function. According to Langdridge (2007) the tone can be revealing of the meaning of the narratives, since it can further illuminate what is not apparent in the content of the stories. Special attention was also given to the rhetorical features of the text and the changes in tone throughout the stories. Furthermore, I tried to identify the function of the narratives and the position of the interviewees in relation to the wider world of stories that they inhabited. This was stage was particularly useful in identifying the positioning of the participants in relation to the dominant political narrative and the counter-narrative across three temporal dimensions.

Stage 3 of the model explored how the selves of the participants were brought into the narrative through the stories that the six participants constructed and how these were related to my research topic. Given that identities are 'articulated only in the *temporal* dimension of human existence' (Ricoeur, 1992: p. 114), this aspect of analysis was of particular importance to my study, since their stories covered a long stretch of time and topological shifts, which brought multi-faceted narrative selves into being.

Stage 4 focused on identifying thematic priorities and relationships. Langdridge (2007) warns against breaking down the text too much in this process and suggests that the researcher tries to delineate major themes without losing sense of the overall narrative presented. The text was therefore analysed systematically, and notes were made in the margins of key sentences. After working through the narrative the first time and listing my ideas, I proceeded to organize these into clusters of meaning based on commonalities. Following this, the themes were worked through in order to establish whether they could stand alone or rather be grouped into one category.

As I replicated the cycle of theme identification for each narrative, I refined the categories and started examining the relationships between them by compiling a table of dominant themes and their associated sub-themes for each narrative (see Appendix IV for an example). This helped

with the clustering of themes and the identification of commonalities across all narratives.

Stage 5 consists of 'destabilizing the narrative', a process through which the researcher engages directly in a political critique of the text by turning to a hermeneutic of suspicion. Given that 'we always have a view from somewhere' (Ricoeur, 1981) and are we socially, politically and culturally bound, we need to complete the hermeneutic circle applying the hermeneutic of suspicion to the text.

Stage 6 represents the 'Critical Synthesis' of the findings, whereby all the previous stages are brought together and integrated.

3.6.4.   Piloting

Holloway (1997) argues that piloting in qualitative research is not always required, since qualitative data collection and analysis tends to naturally improve as the researcher gains insights from previous interviews, which are then used to refine interview schedules and specific questions. However, he recommends that novice researchers do conduct pilot interviews, particularly if they are not familiar with the interviewing technique. Similarly, Langdridge (2007) posits that this stage of research can be a useful way to test the interview questions and obtaining reflective feedback before the official data collection. The implementation of this stage in my research was invaluable, since it helped me reflect on the wording and the order of my questions, as well as in identifying potential practical problems in following the research procedure. The pilot also provided me with the opportunity to fine-tune my skills in conducting narrative interviews and practice the audio-recording, which increased my confidence significantly.

Interview questions were piloted on a 91-year-old former political prisoner. The pilotee was encouraged to provide honest feedback in relation to different aspects of the process that he might have found ambiguous, irrelevant or that he might have not felt comfortable with. By engaging in this process, I realized that some of the questions that I had were already answered at an earlier point in the client's narrative, which prompted me to research narrative interviewing more and helped me reflect on how I would be dealing with a similar issue in future interviews. Contrary to my concerns that the pilotee wouldn't engage with the questions, there was an abundance of contextualized narrative data and an eagerness to voice his experiences. Following the interview feedback, none of it needed discarding or re-wording due

to being perceived as too ambiguous or difficult by the pilotee; each of the questions produced an adequate range of responses, therefore I chose to keep the semi-interview structure as it was initially planned and include the pilot interview in the main results.

3.6.5.   Ethical Considerations

The research study obtained ethical approval by the Research and Ethics Committee of Middlesex University and the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling. (Appendix I) In line with the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2019) stipulations, my main concern was to adhere to the ethical principles of my professional code and protect the participants from discomfort and harm, whilst preserving their confidentiality, dignity and autonomy and avoiding deception at all cost.

As this research topic was highly personal and likely to bring up painful emotions and traumatic experiences, I provided the participants with a debriefing letter in which I included my details and signposting to a recommended psychotherapy clinic – should they have needed further support. All participants received an information sheet outlining the purpose of the study and their role in it (Appendix II). During the screening stage, it was made explicit the data provided would be discussed within research supervision and that total confidentiality could not be guaranteed.

Interviews were conducted in my mother tongue and translated by myself; they were digitally recorded and stored under a password protected file – as specified in the recruitment form (appendix II). Once the dissertation is complete and marked, these will be safely deleted.

Data analysis required careful management and rigorous working through the different stages; in the following section I will be presenting the associated process and procedures, as well as the methodological challenges that I encountered and the adaptations I made, as well as their justifications.

4.   Narrative Analysis

4.1.   Overview

This chapter presents the findings of the critical narrative analysis of the interview data. I will start by presenting a critique of my own subjectivity in relation to the research topic, which was a key component in data analysis, as explained in the methodology section. I will then introduce the narrator and the narrative gathered during the pilot study and presents the emerging themes, the tone and rhetorical function and how the participant's identity was depicted. The 'hermeneutics of suspicion' will be interwoven in the analysis. Jürgen Habermas's (1981) critical theory of society will be drawn upon as the interpretative lens to uncover the 'meaning hidden beneath the surface' (Langdridge, 2007: p. 49).

4.2.   A Critique of the Illusion of Subjectivity

Since all research involves a reciprocity in which there is a 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer,1989) of participant and researcher, I believe that it is important to reflect on how my background and experience might have influenced the research interview process, since this will have significant implications for the data analysis. Given that 'we always have a view from somewhere' (Ricoeur, 1984), making these issues explicit prior to analysing the data was very important, since it would have invariably shaped my questioning, listening and interpretation of the participants' narratives, as well as the knowledge produced by the study.

As someone who lived under the Communist regime for 12 years and who was at the receiving end of family narratives about my grandad's imprisonment and the tortures and re-education programs that the prisoners were subjected to, I was aware of entering the study as an 'insider' with a number of assumptions on the similarity of his experience and the participants' – which might or might have not been there.

As I mentioned earlier, in order to stay close to the experiential accounts of my participants whilst attending to my own potential interfering narratives and biases and making them explicit, I wrote down my own story and my grandfather's story in a heuristic manner, aiming to increase reflexivity through comparing these narratives with the ones of the participants.

In exploring these, I realized that there were underlying assumptions related to positioning these participants as 'fragile' and 'vulnerable' due to their age and prolonged exposure to trauma. Due to my own experience of post-traumatic stress in the aftermath of the '89 revolution, as well as my trainee Counselling Psychologist role within an in-patient psychiatric hospital, I examined how my personal experiences and my clinical training might have predisposed me to adopting a pathologizing approach to the topic and so also shape my questioning and my interpretation of the data. Would I be inclined to focus on the traumatic aspects in my participants' stories? Would I lose sight of their resilience? Once I became aware of how my own story could have obscured the participants' narratives, I tried to subject my assumptions to a hermeneutic of suspicion and bracket them off as much as I could, so that I am able to really hear my participant's story.

Mindful that stories are developed collaboratively with their audiences (Riesman, 2003) I wondered how my presence might have influenced the way in which the narrators depicted their stories. With this in mind, I wondered how being an emigrant Romanian, female trainee counselling psychologist in my forties influenced the construction of stories. This might have led to the participants positioning me as removed from the realities of Romanian life or unable to contain their painful experiences, thus censoring the narrativization of traumatic elements of experiences or negative attitudes against the diaspora and the ones who fled the country. Also, belonging to the field of psychology might have also led to negative attitudes towards me, since imposing arbitrary psychiatric diagnosis on them was one of the main weapons of the Communist Secret Police.

4.3.   Identifying Narratives, Narrative Tone, and Rhetorical Function

In order to exemplify the way in which the data was coded and analysed, I have included a specific extract from the pilotee's interview, as it incorporates some of the key themes and it can provide transparent evidence as to how Critical Narrative Analysis was applied. *Table 1 (appendix VI)* offers an example of the initial coding of data on a line-by-line basis, while *Table 2 (appendix VI)* presents the second coding phase, in which the initial data was reduced and categorized, leading to the development of key themes. The following stage involved identifying the overarching themes within the storied accounts, without fragmenting and losing

the cohesion of the overall narrative (Langdridge, 2007).

Table 1 below details the main profile characteristics of the participants. This information was gathered in the initial contact stages, but some was further clarified during the interviewing process (i.e. place and duration of imprisonment)

Table 1: Profiles of the participants

Participant Alias	Gender	Age	Nationality	Place of imprisonment	Duration and period of imprisonment
Ianis	Male	91	Romanian	Pitești, Gherla, Aiud	11 years (1948-1953) (1958-64)
George	Male	92	Romanian	Iasi, Gherla, Jilava, Balta	6 years (1950-1956)
David	Male	84	Romanian	Sighet, Iasi, Galati, Peninsula, Poarta Albă, Coasta Galeș	5 years (1950-1955)
Luca	Male	80	Romanian	Ministry of Internal Affairs Bucharest, Malmaison Bucharest, Uranus	2 years (1956-1958)
Daniel	Male	92	Romanian	Jilava, Aiud	8 years (1950-1958)
Christian	Male	80	Romanian	Periprava	6 years (1957-1963)

Before presenting the individual narratives and the emergent tone, rhetorical function and identity work, an overview of each participant's unique story will be presented, aiming to place the narratives within a wider socio-historical and relational context. This corresponds to the

'identifying narratives' stage of the analytic process of Langdridge's (2007) CNA model. Pseudonyms have been used in the interests of confidentiality.

Ianis

Ianis was a 91-year-old Romanian man. His parents emigrated from Greece in 1925 and settled in South Dobrogea just before he was born. Ianis grew up in a village on the Black Sea and identified himself as Aromanian (an ethnic and dialectal minority of Romanian people). When he was 14 his family moved to Constanța, and he was sent to a boarding educational establishment. He continued his academic studies by becoming a Philosophy student. His career path was interrupted by his arrest on 21 September 1948 when he was accused of plotting against the Communist Regime and being a supporter of the Legionary Movement.

Ianis was sent to Pitești Penitentiary, where he went through the process of 're-education', the most brutal, inhumane experiment of the Romanian carceral universe. He was there until 1952, after which he was transferred to Gherla until 1953.

He was then released on the provision that he became a reformed New Man and informed the Party of any anti-communist activities in his village. During this time he returned to teaching and met his soon to be wife. Ianis was arrested again in 1958 for not co-operating with the Regime and he received an additional 21 years. He was freed in August 1964 when a general Amnesty was declared.

The master narrative elicited in Ianis's story is one of courage and resilience under the auspices of totalitarian political detention. Throughout this story, he alternates between describing his past and present lived experience, in an effort to both separate and contrast the two. Within his master narrative, there existed other narratives, including stories of isolation, absurdity, loss, friendship and faith.

From the start of his interview, Ianis positioned himself as someone who was determined to fight for his freedom and values, constructing his identity by contrast to an anonymous majority who was succumbing to silence and fear despotically imposed by the Communist Regime.

Whist most of his colleagues fled abroad and asked for political asylum, he chose to remain in the country when the political pressures intensified, fully aware of the high likelihood of imprisonment. The plot line led his story through the dramatic event of going through the Pitești

experiment[3] and the dehumanizing process of re-education, a unique case of horrific systematic torture applied to the student prisoners in Pitești Prison in order to be reborn as 'new men' of the Communist Party and be 'healed'.

The main narrative depicted by Ianis was that of an agentic self who was committed to his values and had a strong sense of responsibility, purpose and self-determination.

The overall function of the rhetorical work was to emphasize the powerlessness of the political detainees and to justify his coerced 'surrender' and choice to life and meaning, in a space beyond any legal-juridical order, whose only aim was the creation of an automatized entity that could be moulded into a loyal follower of the Communist Party.

As he explained how the lead organizers oversaw the sadistic punishments that were inflicted by the re-educated prisoners on their prison mates in order to prove their conversion and loyalty to the Party, shadowing one another in the process to ensure that each punishment was correctly inflicted, there was a notable shift to a tragic tone, with highly emotional and traumatic parts that were in places marked by non-narratability and ruptures of language.

Ianis described his choice to 'stop resisting' as an authentic one, congruent with his values and an agentic life story.

'First and foremost, I cared about my family and sometimes it crossed my mind that I might be needed as a witness… and I didn't want to die in detention, because that was not the place I wanted to die in… and if I had to die somewhere it had to be on the other side of those walls, not killed by improvised enemies... by one of my own colleagues... that would have been miserable, there was no heroism in this'. (Ianis, Lines 339-343)

Ianis went on to interweave a narrative of salvation through culture and art as he described the period between his two arrests and his active participation in the cultural life of the community, presenting as someone who was passionate by music, philosophy and literature, and identifying himself as 'gifted'. In analysing the function of his rhetoric, it positioned him as someone who embraced his destiny and was content with his life choices and refusal to become a Securitate informer, despite the hardships that he had to endure as a result. There was a return to pathos

---

[3] The experiment aimed at mentally annihilating the political prisoners by forcing them to abjure their most profound values. Following the principles of Anton Makarenko, it was believed that one effective way of reaching such a goal was by applying torture continuously, without leaving individuals any time to recover. In order to achieve it, a part of the political prisoners was converted into the torturers of the other part. In short, after a horrifying process of self-denial ('unmasking') the victims were turned into perpetrators just to end up all together by being either repressed or totally re-educated.

as he narrated his longing to see his wife and family after nine years of confinement and he proudly recounted how he rebuilt his life and went back to teaching philosophy.

The content of the narrative returned to the issue of corruption and repression as ongoing phenomena. Using a more thoughtful sombre tone, he described his frustration and regret that the cause he had fought for hasn't been accomplished, and corruption was still at the heart of the country. Ianis paradoxically described himself as 'not free', but 'fundamentally free' and seemed to be able to hold and integrate both of these into his identity. He employed the rhetorical function of contrast as he referred to not feeling free externally, but having a sense of total intrinsic freedom: '*…I feel free when I am with my wife and we are reminiscing about our life together…as she didn't make sense of it back then…that freedom I have it in my soul*' (Ianis, Lines 550-558)

David

David was a 84-year-old man currently living in Bucharest. He was arrested when he was only 17 and endured 5 years of detention between 1950 and 1955 in a number of penitentiaries and labour camps of the Romanian Gulag including: Sighet, Iasi, Galati, Peninsula, Poarta Alba, Coasta Gales.

He was born in 1933 in Huși, a town located in Moldova, Romania. His family had bourgeois origins and he received a very good education. His father was a renowned lawyer, and his mother was a professor, which made him an obvious target for the New Order whose main agenda was the persecution and annihilation of any decadent and putrid bourgeois elements.

David's master narrative focused on his determination and commitment to fight for his creed and freedom; he emphasized the importance of taking responsibility for one's actions and making life-affirming choices that are congruent with one's values and beliefs, even under the most unpropitious of times.

Within this, he included a couple of other narratives of romantic relationships and loss. He initially positioned himself as someone who belonged to a distinct class and a defender of its tradition, education and ideals. The rhetorical function of David's story is that of compare and contrast between the European civilisation and the tribal Eastern one of Soviet descent, which constituted the foundations of the Romanian Gulag and its extermination Regime.

His tone was sad and angry as he described the oppression and persecution that he endured

during secondary school as a member of the 'putrid and decadent' class and the 'enemy of the people'. He recalled being taken out of lessons and publicly humiliated for having 'unhealthy origins' together with other colleagues and the strong sense of powerlessness and confusion that accompanied those moments.

David went on to describe his arrest aged 17 due to joining a group of students who protested against class oppression, resulting in mass arrests and his condemnation to four years of incarceration. His tone was tinged with anger as he described the unfairness of his trial and arbitrariness of the sentencing.

A narrative of family ethos was interlaced throughout, and David employed the rhetorical function of explanation to describe the reasons behind his sentencing. He went on to tell the story of his father's return from Paris in 1921 and his adamant refusal to join the Communist Party as a Prefect, which resulted in years of harassment and humiliations of his entire family.

David constructed an intricate web of narratives that gravitated around his strong family values and intergenerational beliefs and the suffering and deceit that he experienced as a result of his ethical core and the resulting life choices he made. His tone became tragic as he explained how the woman he asked to marry, whose father had died in a Communist prison, decided to leave him for another man due to his precarious societal position and his unappealing 'former prisoner' status after his release.

Continuing in the vein of pathos, he explained that her betrayal hurt him more than all the tortures inflicted upon him from the guards and broke his spirit. This marked the beginning of a narrative of taking stock, constructing a self that was agentive, tenacious and focus on growth. David's narrative discourse exuded optimism and hope, depicting an agentic self who managed to go back to his studies and graduates from Agronomy, as well as Law School, took every employment opportunity he was offered to support himself and managed to achieve his professional goal of becoming a lawyer, as well as starting a family.

Another self-defining memory emerged in a mini-narrative in which David storied the loss of his son aged 18 in a tragic swimming accident and the crisis that this brought into his life after him 1989 Revolution. His tone became tragic as he narrated the fragmentation that this event created in his life story and the impact that this had on his marriage. From a rhetorical viewpoint, there was a highly intense meaning making process and a nodal point in the narrative script in this section of the interview, where David emphasized the importance of continuing with valued roles and creating a meaningful life story as an adaptive way of coping with his

loss.

George

George was a 92-year-old Romanian man. He was well educated and lived in Constanta, a city by the Black Sea Coast. He was born in Bucharest to a middle-class family. He was arrested in 1950 and was condemned to 20 years of imprisonment by the Military Tribunal. He spent over six years in prisons like Jilava, Gherla and Iași, as well as in the labour colonies in the Danube-Black Sea Channel.

The dominant narrative in George's account was centred on the description of an archetypal journey into darkness which he often referenced as an *infernal descent*, using frequent analogies to Dante's Divine Comedy.

From a rhetorical viewpoint, the aim of this was to emphasize his meaning making and self-discovery journey that he embarked on as he descended into a subterranean bestiary of death and got to experience the terrible depths of true suffering and terror, the function of the text appeared to be that of explaining and documenting the indignities, deprivation, conscripted labour, torture and execution that he witnessed, and the permanent sense of ontological threat that this instilled in him and thousands of other sufferers.

George framed the narrative of self-discovery and search for freedom amidst the oppressive socio-political context of the 50s and the persecution of intellectuals. Coming from a family of academics, George quickly became a target of the Regime. He illustrated this by storying an event in which he defended one of his Jewish colleagues in a high school altercation, resulting in him being expelled and arbitrarily moved to a different educational establishment. George positioned himself as an inquisitive teenager, who was eager to learn about the world and was fascinated by different cultures and customs. This made him choose to pursue a Journalism degree, but soon became disillusioned when he realized that the Press was under the complete monopoly of the Communist Party. George's tone became ironic as he explained how after dropping out of university and enrolling in the Military, he became aware that it was entirely subordinated to the Securitate, Romania's Secret Police. After refusing to become a full-fledged informer for the Party, George was trialled by the Military Tribunal and sent to prison. This event marked a narrative shift, as his identity moved from an expression of lack of agency, where he positioned himself as the victim of other people's actions, to one where he took stock and fought for his values, fully aware that this would entail the end of his military career and

long-term imprisonment. This was marked as a defining moment for George, who then came to the realization that attempting to escape suffering in order to be free of it paradoxically renders one less free.

There was a parallel narrative of salvation through culture that ran through the storytelling script. For George, taking part in improvised 'reading circles' and learning foreign languages seemed to have provided him with the moral support and spiritual sustenance throughout his four years of detention, operating like a buffer between his mind and the aggressive reality he was exposed to. His suffering appeared to have led him to more insight and wisdom and a reconfiguration of spiritual values, which was also epitomised in his conversion to Christianity towards the end of his carceral ordeal. Pronounced as 'inept', he was put on starvation ratios but transferred to lighter jobs and hospitalized, which he interpreted as a divine intervention, as it allowed him to survive his long condemnation.

Faith and spiritual communion through literature and culture were conceptualized as pivotal in George's narrative of survival and endurance and were the red thread that ran through his story, from the pre-incarceration period to the present moment.

After 1989, George returned to journalism and authored a number of books about his Gulag experience. His tone became subdued as he expressed his struggles with fragmentation and psychological distress when working on his current book about the painful experience of women in the Communist prisons. From a rhetorical standpoint, there was a continuous engagement with his own story and other stories from the Gulag, in an attempt to give voice to their survivors and making the past present.

George expressed his concern that people were not only silent after the 1989 revolution, but also silenced – since prisoners were unable to speak about their unutterable traumas and the process was not facilitated in any way, resulting in an additional layer of isolation and aloneness for the very ones who had already experienced profound ruptures in their worlds.

There was another interposed narrative of coping with illness and working through the devastating neurological and psychological effects of incarceration, where George's self-story unravelled episodes when past memories and intrusions led to a loss of ontological and epistemological safety. From a rhetorical perspective, George's story seemed to be more descriptive and explanatory, aiming to illuminate and open a window onto a threatening truth that he felt utterly compelled to engage with and bear witness to.

The function of his storied discourse was that of signalling a strong need for listeners in dealing

with survivors of the Romanian Gulag, whist also expressing disappointment on how marginalised and misshaped the historical Communist past had been by educators and decision-makers. At the end of the interview, the tone of George's narrative shifted to resigned and withdrawn as he reflected on the current political climate, the high levels of corruption and the canonical narrative of socialist nostalgia. His tone became tired and tinged with sadness as he resignedly reflected on the fact that only a fraction of the Securitate Archive had become available to the public, keeping the survivors of Communist prisons entangled in a web of lies, deception and intimidation with their perpetrators.

Daniel

Daniel was 92 and was born in Piatra Neamț, a town in the region of Moldova, to a middle-class family. He was married and had three children and two grandchildren and currently lived in the city of Constanta. In 1948 the family's goods were confiscated by the Police State and they ended up in debt and poverty.

Daniel had started a university degree in Chemistry and was offered a scholarship in the Soviet Union, which he turned down due to the resentment that he felt towards the Regime and how they had mistreated his family. He was arrested in November 1950, during his third year at university, and was imprisoned for 8 years under the accusation of 'anti-communist activities'. He served time in Gherla, Jilava and Aiud prisons.

The main tone of Daniel' narrative was sober, contemplative and matter-of-fact, interposed with a thoughtful and sometimes tragic tone when reviewing the past. His tone shifted to a lighter, more optimistic one towards the end of the interview, as he described his day-to-day life and reflected on his children's achievements and his role as a grandfather.

Daniel's narrative covered his need to take stock and fight for his values and freedom. He described how he deliberately joined a resistance group of students in Piatra Neamț to oppose the despotic Regime that the Communists implemented. In terms of rhetorical function, Daniel's narrative seeks to persuade and justify stating that '*we couldn't not take action – as young people who had a conscience and deep rooted national and Christian values, it felt like there was no choice but to fight bac*k'. There was a strong sense of *amor fati* in Daniel's account, where he conceptualized his experience of suffering as a blessing and a unique opportunity for growth, stating that if he had been given the choice, he would have acted the

same way all over again.

The self being brought into being by Daniel's narrative was agentic, assembling and configuring instances of his past acts where he showed self-determination and aligned himself to his purpose, meaning and sense of responsibility despite the unspeakable traumas that he had to suffer at the hands of the guardians and the re-educators.

There were struggles and setbacks in Daniel's account when the daily beatings, humiliations and illness dislodged him from his agentic life plot. However, this was soon restored by his serendipitous encounter with a priest and his reconnection with spirituality and other inmates in Jilava prison, which he deemed to be a turning point in his life-story.

After his release from prison, Daniel regained and strengthened his sense of agency and managed to rebuild his life, despite the stigma associated with former political prisoners and the frail physical condition that he had been left with after eight years of brutal labour and starvation. His narrative also probed the issue of a gifted individual's self-actualization in a totalitarian universe. He talked about his predicament as an academic, torn between the love for his work and his reluctance to collaborate with the Regime. The function of the rhetoric seemed to be that of justification, as Daniel mentioned reaching a compromise with his conscience by allowing himself to work on technological projects that he deemed to be of greater benefit to the people that to the Regime. His tone became proud as he listed his professional successes and his tenacity in following his career goals. As he reflected on his life story, Daniel labelled it as a '*tumultuous but happy ending one'* as he got to a place where he experienced a profound sense of personal freedom and wholeness that he felt was no longer being threatened.

Daniel engaged in story making and constructed a future self in the narrative plotting that was aligned with meaning and purpose, as reflected in the following quote:

'*When I go, I'll die a happy man. God has been good to me; I have been lucky to live such a fulfilled life. All the suffering turned out to be a blessing – it taught us more about human existence that any university would have done. For that I am immensely grateful.'*

Luca

Luca was an 80-year-old man who lived in Bucharest with his wife. He was well educated and came from a family of peasants in Băilești, a village in the region of Oltenia, Romania. His father was an agricultural entrepreneur and had lost everything with the collectivization reform of 1955. When he was arrested, Luca was completing the second year of his Law Degree. He had been talking to other students about taking part in a manifestation of support for the Hungarian Communist counter-revolution and was imprisoned for two years at the Ministry of Internal Affairs Headquarters and Malmaison, Bucharest.

The main narrative constructed by Luca was that of a freedom fighter's readiness to vociferously protest against the injustice of the New Order, despite the hardships and the indignities that he has to suffer as a result, together with over a thousand students that were arrested for manifesting their solidarity with the Hungarian Revolution protesters in November 1956.

From a rhetorical function perspective, Luca used the interview initially to justify and defend his political actions as well as to paint a comprehensive picture of the socio-political context of the time.

Between 1949-1962, Romania's nascent communist regime initiated a violent campaign to collectivize, following the Soviet model. The implications of this far-reaching social engineering process were that Luca's family ended up under siege and constantly persecuted by the 'Collective'. In a sad contemplative tone, Luca explained how his family and community were subjected to intense pressure (threats, blackmail, and beatings) as means of persuasion to convince them to yield their land to the collective farming units, assaulting the very foundations of rural life and transforming them into large bureaucratic establishments, hidden behind the wooden language of class warfare.

A new narrative of loneliness and pain emerged with Luca's arrest and trial. He recalled how he had been pushed into a black car, forced to wear tin glasses and driven away to the Securitate Headquarters. In a pessimistic tone, Luca offered a painful description of how the notorious Romanian secret police apparatus applied panoply of repressive methods on him and his colleagues to make them divulge the names of other students who had anti-communist ideas.

 He went on to describe the unjust, discriminatory and abusive practices that he was subjected to and the two-year experience of imprisonment in the basement of the Ministry of Internal

Affairs. The solitary confinement, the loneliness of being sealed off from everyone he cared for, as well as the constant worrying about his family seemed to have weighed a lot more in Luca's narrative than the beatings, deprivations and humiliations received on a regular basis.

A strong narrative of salvation through faith was interwoven in Luca's account, who stated:

'*The solitude was agonizing…they have cut me off from my family and friends...I was emaciated and broken. I wore the same shirt for two years….They took everything away from m except for secret inner core that they didn't manage to unlock. That was when I went to when I talked to God and asked him to take care of my loved ones, or when I reminisced about my childhood or the stories I read. I often thought of Dumas's story, the Count of Monte Cristo… and that is what kept me going. I was in one the most hopeless God forsaken places on earth, but I still held on to that flicker of hope*' (*Luca, Lines 358-364*)

After 2 years, Luca was unexpectedly acquitted at his Trial by the Military Tribunal, together with three other students, whilst the others received heavy sentences and were sent to Gherla prison. Luca conceptualized this event as a 'miracle', as a divine intervention, and a turning point in his existence and self-configuration, which strengthened his sense of agency and meaning. His tone gained optimistic notes as he described his journey to become a Supreme Court Lawyer and the first Ombudsman of Romania.

The self being brought in by the Luca's narrative was one who was acutely aware of the intersection of his own biography with the historical process. The climate of social upheaval which marked his youth seemed to have had a significant impact on his worldview and identity formation. Fighting for a collective cause and shared values and ideals appeared to have provided him with an enduring sense of purpose and authorship of his existence.

When invited to reflect on how he was experiencing his freedom twenty years after the 1989 Revolution, Luca expressed disappointment with the current political class and the corruption that was still present at a macro-level, seeping into every aspect of everyday living. Luca ended the interview in a contemplative tone, emphasizing the importance of giving testimony and telling one's story, despite the invariable painful physical and psychological effects of revisiting the past in the case of many ex political prisoners. Meeting up with former colleagues or their families and taking part in cultural events and research about the Romanian Communist Gulag had been fundamental to Luca's healing journey and his coming to terms with the past. This will be further expands on in the Main Themes section of this paper.

Christian

Christian was an 80-year-old Romanian man who was educated to college level and was a retired engineer. He lived with his wife, who he had been married to for 60 years and they had two grown-up children.

He was born in Constanta and came from a working-class background. He was an only child of a radiophonic engineer and a primary school teacher. From the beginning of the interview Christian positions himself as a free thinker and constructs a self that is inquisitive and non-conformist. Having a radio in the house, he manifested his freedom through secretly listening to the BBC, Radio London and The Voice of America, as well as reading Western literature – which was deemed as 'dangerous' and counter to the education of the Communist youth at the time. The rhetorical work at the beginning of his story is that of justification, with Christian emphasizing that he was only 16, and a 'child' at the time of his arrest, completely unaware of the implications of his actions.

Christian was arrested by the Romanian Secret Police in August 1957 on the motif of 'anti-communist practices' such as reading 'decadent Western literature', listening to foreign broadcasts and expressing the wish to leave the country in an informal chat with a colleague; this resulted in his imprisonment for a period of 6 years in Iaşi, Gherla and Aiud, followed by the Periprava labour camp on the Black Sea-Danube Channel.

His main narrative was one of *amor fati,* describing the process of coming to terms with his own limits when faced with the absolute worst that humanity had to offer and the unpredictable bio-political forces that altered his life. Despite the starvation, beatings and tortures he experienced, Christian' story painted an ontological stance which embraced life and continually chose meaning in the face of arbitrary forces and strife. The tone of Christian's interview was mostly light and optimistic, interposed with a sad thoughtful tone when reviewing the past.

There was an interwoven narrative of development and transition to adulthood, which was storied in the transfer from the Securitate cells to the youth prison in Iasi, and finally to the notoriously brutal penitentiaries of Gherla and Aiud. The plot line led the story through the dramatic happenings within the Romanian Gulag, inclusive of the bone-crushing cold, the tuberculosis, the fear, and the psychological distress of his inmates, narrating a non-linear sequence of temporal experiences of living through solitude and vulnerability, stumbling around in disorientation, followed by moments of integration, meaning-making and connection

that help him survive within the carceral landscape and beyond.

Christian used the interview to explain how learning the language of the walls offered him a tangible escape from his daily suffering and the torment of solitude and enabled him to become a member of the prison community and a 'carrier' or shared meaning. The rhetorical function of his narrative positioned Christian as someone who wished to continue to give testimony and keep alive the story of the Communist prisons. The very act of composing and memorizing poems and stories became a raison d'être for Christian, since the mental inscription of passages provided him with a reason to keep living, a cathartic act of both spiritual transcendence and mental fitness.

When asked how his experience of incarceration might have changed his sense of personal freedom, Christian promptly affirmed that it completely annihilated his fear and strengthened his spirituality, which helped him withstand the permanent surveillance of the notorious Securitate right up until the Revolution in 1989. His narrative sought to explain how 'the Gulag' became an entity that many of his inmates carried with them even outside the carceral space, which generalized at a wider societal level as 'the camp chronotope' (Bakhtin, 1981) – a place and time of ontological uprooting and terror. Shifting to a pessimistic tone, Christian story focused on the climate of fear/oppression that the whole nation lived in under the auspices of an unquestionably efficient Police State, which in his view had become sedimented in the psyche of the population, resulting in a hybrid quasi-democratic regime, where former leaders of the Regime maintained influential positions and put hurdles in the way of justice delaying the criminalization of the Communist past.

The living tissue of the narrated story became infused with sadness as Christian described his disillusionment with the current political climate and the nostalgia that characterized the dominant narrative on Communism on a wider societal level. In his view, the void created by the Communist Regime in knowledge and information about its criminal past, together with the heated political struggles over the memory of communism, had generated a form of collective amnesia that further hindered de-communization of the country and the unveiling of the cultural trauma that simmered beneath. This hermeneutical mismatch between Christian's life story and his perceived canonical narrative of Communist nostalgia will be further illustrated in the Main Themes section.

4.4. Thematic Priorities and Relationships

The following section will focus on identifying the major themes and corresponding sub-themes within the participant's story, without losing a sense of the overall cohesive narrative (Langridge, 2007).

Following analysis, the three major themes have emerged as distinct of each other. These and the corresponding subordinate themes derived from my analysis are presented in Table 2. The first theme captures the participants' experiences prior to their incarceration: their worldviews, values, cultural attitudes, preoccupations, concerns and also intergenerational influences of political activity. I then moved on to explore what happened during their detention years, following the participants' journeys through the interrogation process to the trial/sentencing and release. Finally, I focused on the period post incarceration and how the participants experienced their freedom after the collapse of the Communist Regime.

Table 2. Overarching themes and corresponding subthemes

4.4.1. Taking Stock	4.4.2. A Painful Journey Through the Carceral World	4.4.3. Setting History Straight
4.4.1.1. Following the Compass of One's Values	4.4.2.1. Narrativizing Trauma (Unremitting Torture)	4.4.3.1. The Long Arm of the Gulag (The Destructive Effects of Political Incarceration)
4.4.1.2. Hunted Down as 'Enemies of the Working Class'	4.4.2.2. Coping with Adversity. (The Power of Being-With)	4.4.3.2. The Dark Pervasive Legacy of Totalitarianism
4.4.1.3. Confronting the Totalitarian Machine	4.4.2.3. The Primacy of the Transcendent	4.4.3.3. Reclaiming One's Life

4.4.1.   Major Theme 1: Taking Stock

This overarching theme is illustrated in the narrators' recounts of the period before their incarceration and the full instauration of political totalitarianism. What I was particularly interested in was trying to understand how the narrators were experiencing their freedom before incarceration and what made them take a stand at that particular time in their lives. The reason for choosing 'taking stock' to illustrate this theme was the fact that it conceptually incorporates the adjustments that the participants had to make in response to the repressive political measures of the Communist Party, as well as the personal inventory of their beliefs and values that accompanied their stocktaking process.

The destruction of national identity and the Sovietization of the country through the repression of the press, free speech, national literature and culture, the church and other political parties, as well as the replacement of geographical localities and street names with Marxist-Leninist ones are part of the broader subtheme 'Being hunted down as 'the enemies' of the Working Class', which refers to the increased oppression and discrimination against the non-members by the nascent Communist State and the instauration of the Secret Police. All the narrators offered a rich account of the Regime's modus operandi that culminated with the beginning of arbitrary arrests and the prison and labour camp massacres to follow. The first subtheme illustrates how having a strong values system facilitated a positive appraisal of adversity and enabled the participants to construct their Gulag experiences as meaningful and courageously confront the totalitarian machine, which I will go on to detail below.

4.4.1.1.   *Subordinate Theme: Following the Compass of One's Values*

This subtheme illuminates how the narrators' beliefs shaped their process of taking stock, how they thought about and evaluated their experiences of political activities, the legitimacy of the Regime and its violent acts, and their own values. This represented a powerful factor in the narratives of all the participants, enabling them to stay strong for the most part, despite the atrocities committed against them. In the paragraph below, Ianis explained the reason behind his strong opposition to Communist ideology and his adhesion to what he called a 'semi-political movement':

'*Ever since college I adhered to this semi-political movement, who had certain ideals – we had a political creed, based on our faith mostly, since we were what one could call*

'religious'…because faith can give people a certain balance… So the period before I was arrested was a time when it crossed our minds that we might be arrested eventually – because in 1945 when the Regime was installed – certain political movements started all over the country and we were open to taking part…' (Ianis, Lines 41-48)

The above extract illustrates Ianis' commitment to living deliberately and not by default and being congruent to his values, whist showing increased awareness of the potential repercussions for not embracing the Communist Party. Furthermore, he positioned himself by explaining the values underlying his creed and placing faith at the heart of it. The rhetorical function seemed to be that of advocating faith as a source of equilibrium, since '*it teaches you how to be kind, compassionate, how to be close to others, to love one another…it does nothing with violence*'(*Ianis*, Line 45-46).

According to McKay (2003) transcendent beliefs are those that supply meaning in people's lives and are often based on spiritual or cultural foundations. For Ianis, such beliefs offered clarity in his life and rendered unexpected events less threatening, enabling him to be more acceptant of what couldn't be changed. Walsh (1998) describes spirituality as a key process in resilience building. In the case of Ianis, his faith appeared to have fuelled an active investment in his internal values, providing him with a sense of meaning, inner wholeness, and connection with others.

Ianis framed his narrative of taking stock and political action within the context of increased oppression and discrimination towards the 'non-subscribers' by what he euphemistically referred to as 'The New Vision'. As he went on to elaborate on the 'resistance points' formed around the country, he proudly positioned himself as a member of the out-group; in the extract below the primacy of the collective self is evident '… *we were just people without guns, people who believed and manifested ourselves discreetly, no violence at all (Lines 61-62)*'; in his description, he employed the rhetorical function of compare and contrast by depicting the oppressive measures taken by the Regime against the students and their expulsion 'outside of normality'.

Christian's account also provided a strong representation of this subtheme:

'*I have always been a free spirit and believed in my God given right to express myself, it was part of my upbringing, which was the reason behind my arrest; being the son of a radiophonist and brought up with a radio in the house, which was quite a rarity at the time, allowed me to access information and share it freely with my colleagues –which was a very*

risky business...little did I know that one of the student's father was working at the Party's Central Committee! At the time, every denunciation was automatically followed by an arrest ...but as I was saying, I openly discussed things with friends and ended up woken up at 6am but the Secret Police, who took me away from home and accused me of hostility against the Regime of popular democracy, and of harbouring wishes to leave the country, which was in fact true...I loved adventures and highly valued my freedom, which ironically and sadly led to my arrest before I turned 17.' (Christian, Lines 52-63)

Christian described himself as open, free-spirited and adventurous, linking these traits to his upbringing and family values. Throughout the story he constructed, Christian positioned himself as someone who held strong spiritual and cultural values since his teenage years, explicitly stating that it was these fundamentals that helped him find and create meaning from adversity.

Similar to Ianis and Christian, Luca's system of values was also rooted in his family and community experiences. Expanding on this idea, he had arrived at viewing the actions of the regime as illegitimate and wrong. When describing the effects of collectivisation on his family's welfare, I noticed that his tone shifted from a neutral to an increasingly sad one and his demeanour became more apathetic. From a linguistic point of view, he employed a lot more pauses and sighed heavily, which made me think of the powerful embodiment of collective trauma and oppression and how strongly this was manifested in the intersubjective space. As he contextualized the beginning of collectivisation, he positioned himself as an outsider, on the other side of the canonical narrative of the times, as an unfortunate member of 'the middle-class category'. Throughout his entire narrative, Luca constructed as self with strong rooted family and cultural values, which he felt compelled to defend when they came under attack from the new political order:

'I come from a family of honest, hard-working peasants, from Oltenia, and where I am from we could already feel an increased pressure – we didn't own a lot of land, but I suppose we belonged to the middle-class category – but we did have the pressure of the quotas. Later came the pressure of joining the Collective, also called the CAPs, the agricultural collective organizations…during that period the Russians took plenty away from the country's resources. What made a really strong impression on me back then was when uncle Fane came back – he was working on threshing the land; back then there were threshing floors where people used to go with their shafts of wheat and once the threshers did their job, they took their share and came home. But it was there that the quotas were taken from people, too. He barely had any wheat on the bottom of a sack, because it was

all taken away from him. He was crying…my grandmother was with him opened the main gate for him…and they were both crying and cursing that he only managed to bring a little wheat of the whole harvest. That's what happened. So these were the feelings I had back then…my beliefs and family values were under attack' (Luca, Lines 13-27)

In the same vein, George described how his personal values came under threat in his narrativisation of a school incident when he stood up for one of his peer in an altercation with the son of a Communist Party official, attracting his disciplinary move to a different educational establishment and the label of a 'putrid element of society'; in the extract below, he elaborated on another nodal narrative point in his life story – the refusal to become a Security informer - which culminated with his Gulag incarceration:

'They suggested that I should become an informer and subjected me to a long and detailed inquisition, where I was shocked to find out how much they actually knew about my background, including the story from College…they asked me to sign an agreement, which I did – out of cowardice and fear. However, this felt like an unbearable psychological burden, what I experienced completely terrified me. I wanted to commit suicide and I could have done it... had access to means…but I didn't, I don't know why I didn't go through with it but I didn't . After 24hours of pure moral anguish I entered a state of …I don't even know how to describe this…acute confusion, made up of a myriad of different feelings: shame, disgust, fear…that was the moment when I really got to know and understand fear, a feeling that was going to stay with me for decades… I went straight to Colonel Ștefănescu, an old school Army crony, who initially wanted to kick me out as I didn't book an appointment, and I told him 'Please, it's a matter of life and death!'…he did listen to me. In his naivety, he thought that he'd convince the lowlifes to give up pursuing me becoming an informer by telling them I had no talent to do that…this in fact has cost me a great deal: four years of imprisonment' (George, Lines 159-173)

In this section of the interview, I could notice that George's somatic experience mirrored his linguistic description of a confused psychological and noetic state when reflecting on his sense of acute fear. He seemed disorientated and he held his head between his head, looking at the floor. It was noteworthy that he placed a strong emphasis on the word 'fear'. I found it interesting how fear took on a dual resonance for George, acting as both a personal experience of self-defeat as well as a vehicle for critiquing the very system of socio-political and cultural values and norms that made him feel fearful, ashamed and disgusted.

I could also notice that George's tone shifted from sad to sober and condemnatory as he presents, he as taking control of the situation. His narrative identity moves from an expression of stasis and lack of agency, where he positions himself as a victim of the actions of others, to a stance where he courageously stands up and fights for his values, knowing that would entail the end of his military career and lead to his imprisonment.

Mallet and Wapshott (2011) state that it is important to move beyond static pictures of individual identity and consider it to be something that is multi-faceted and always in flow, referring back whilst projecting forwards, negotiating and adapting in the present and therefore 'articulated only in the temporal dimension of human existence' (Ricoeur, 1992: p.114). This approach is helpful in understanding the reconfiguration process in George's identity work in the paragraph above, whereby his role required actions that conflicted with his pre-existing sense of self, leading to a heightened state of tension.

Collectively, all of the participants positioned themselves as being conscious of how their beliefs, values, attitudes and convictions were threatened by the new political order, which informed their decision to confront the totalitarian ideology and guided their ulterior actions. Having a strong belief system facilitated a positive appraisal of crisis and adversity and enabled them to have a global orientation to life as comprehensible and meaningful. Each participant made reference to a moral view on what are right and a belief in intrinsic freedom as the main values that enabled them to withstand adversity and survive the tortures and humiliations of the Regime.

4.4.1.2. *Subordinate Theme: Hunted Down as 'Enemies of the Working Class'*

It was evident from all the narrators' accounts that the destruction and annihilation of national identity and values was one of the main aims of the Communist agenda. All of the participants made reference to how they experienced this individually with the instauration of Communism in 1945, the beginning of collectivization and the Russification of the country. As far as the title of this subordinate theme is concerned, it is strongly interlinked to the previous one in that it provides more insight into the background political context that the narrators articulated their belief systems against.

To summarize the findings thus far, one of the salient commonalities that emerged was that the participants' actions didn't happen in a vacuum, but in response to an active campaign to

repudiate and exterminate the 'enemies of the working class', a label which was assigned to all of them due to their academic status, agrarian background, social class or a combination of these. Being a student in a Romanian University brought a high degree of prestige, since there were high academic requirements on being accepted and a large portion of the student body came from peasant backgrounds. The Romanian students were also highly patriotic and had strong national conservative values, which posed a threat to the New Vision and deemed as 'anti-Communist activity', a phrase applied to anything that the Communists found politically expedient. All of the participants articulate the threat to freedom and the oppressive actions of the regime as a loss of identity, and annihilation of family and cultural values. The participants collectively conveyed a sense of disorientation, existential heaviness and psychological suffering, all of which were associated with the persecutory political measures of the New Order.

As he contextualized the beginning of the Communist movement, Ianis referred to him and others as being increasingly discriminated against and '*left outside normality*', therefore so persecuted, ostracized. However, in spite of the devaluing of his values and the deprivations he had endured, Ianis presented a very solid and coherent sense of self, deeply rooted in his cultural traditions and spirituality. He described himself as a dreamer and a romantic, stating that '*it was in my make up to search for a kind of – how should I call it – total freedom*' (*Ianis, Line 30*). Ianis aligned this to his sense of identity as he constructed a self that was highly aware and owned his choices early on in the narrative, when he stated that his arrest hadn't come as a surprise.

In terms of rhetorical function, he defended his position by vehemently denying the 'extreme right' accusations and describing his political organisation as a 'national earthly movement' rooted in tradition, culture and faith. His tone became tinged with cynicism as he mentioned the political distortions that the Communists resorted to in order to gain new members, emphasizing the 'bait' as the main stratagem of the Red Party.

Ianis's tone became more serious as he reflected on the wider socio-political context and reminisced about the installation of the Regime in 1945 and the incipient Sovietisation of the country. Rhetorically, he predominantly employed explanation and description as he expanded on the rapid russification of language and culture through the replacement of old street/city names with 'Lenin' or 'Stalin' and the censorship of national literature. Interestingly, as he started to describe the impact of the Romanian-Soviet economic enterprises (SovRoms) on the economy and the draining of the country's resources, there was a significant drop in his tone

and certain closure of his posture – which made me think of the mirrored embodiment of this oppressive climate in the intersubjective space.

'Of course, the Communist Regime, which started here in 1945, the so called 'New Vision', the heirs of Marx and Engels, Lenin and Stalin, put hurdles in our way… as a student in Bucharest, I felt its effects quite deeply - if one weren't a member of the Socialist Party they wouldn't get any bread in the canteen, you'd get polenta…they made sure we were left on the outside of normality'(Ianis, Lines 52-57).

Ianis gave the example of discriminatory practices in the quality of food provided to students and the creation of a 'Grey Army' by the Communist Party, in order to increase the visibility and the humiliation of the opponents, as well as the beginning of police spying and the modus operandi of the State Police. His narrative concentrated on the political events that climaxed with the 15th of May manifestation and the 'largest number of arrests', detailing the Party's use of a Prison Hub and the division of the detainees according to their social category as a stratagem aimed 'to prevent strengthening an anti-communist movement'.

As he continued to portray the increasingly oppressive conditions of the people by describing the replacement of prayer/cult areas with storage rooms, Ianis directly quoted the prison director's words: *'There is no need for God within amongst these people, they are lost – we will make sure to educate them, that is – to re-educate them (Ianis, Lines 110-111)'*; his tone became very emotional as he described the Regime's solution to the overflow of arrests, resulting in the creation of the Danube-Black Sea Canal and the labour camps modelling the Russian Gulag, which he metaphorically labelled as '*bitter pearls along the river*'. His narrative depicted the arbitrariness of arrests and the absurdity of the crimes (i.e. students were condemned for listening to the radio or attending a certain educational establishment) and he justified the validity of his story by making reference to national documents written by historians. He continued to elaborate on how the Regime 'worked' by describing their infiltration of Secret Police informers amongst the population, highlighting the overall sense of ontological threat that prevailed at an individual and societal level.

As with Ianis, George pointed out to the spiritual misery that he had succumbed to due to the climate of terror and oppression that took over the country. What he explicitly revealed was that the pain he had experienced transcended the moral and reached the deeper layers of his spirit. This seems to have been the result of the absurd inversion of values that took place in the academic world and the indoctrination process that students had been subjected to. Although

George used the adjective '*laughable'*, I noticed that his tone was emotional and sad, which made me think that his emotional response was incongruous and that it might have been difficult or unsafe for him to put those feelings into words in that particular moment.

As he went on to talk about the surreal feeling brought on by the Gulag memories and the Communist Era and the impact of these on his worldview, George's tone became more sombre and pessimistic. When discussing his decision to drop out of university and pursue a military career, together with the lack of awareness he had with regards to the consequences of his actions and the pervasiveness of the Regime's cruel modus operandi, George's tone moved into a self-critical and remorseful register. He positioned himself a 'naive kid', an 'adventurer' against a backdrop of dissonance and absurdity, manifesting a strong hindsight bias in relation to this past event. The rhetorical function seemed to be that of justification and explanation, implying that he had limited awareness of the choices that were open to him, ironically ending up more engulfed in an absurd predicament - which would eventually unearth an existential crisis for him.

'I was doing a degree in Journalism, and I was an avid reader of Romanian and foreign literature alike   I remember reading Balzac and Flaubert and worrying about getting caught – the atmosphere was so heavy and suspicious, there was a permanent witch hunt whereby the intellectuals- the so called 'enemies of the People' were the prey – I felt an utter spiritual misery, not only moral but soul- destroying, spiritual. And that was due to the fact that some of us were highly educated, but the vast majority had minimal studies – the so called 'working class' students. They had no knowledge, and they were allowed into universities to study Law, History or Philology – all they did was to infinitely regurgitate Communist mantras – it was laughable. Then our curriculum changed, and the main focus became the basis of Marxism – Leninism... there were some surreal scenarios that… [long sigh] go beyond human understanding. Anyways, being a natural born adventurer I decided to drop out of university and enrol in the Military Academy…I was to find out that the brainwashing that took place at university was almost benign compared to the one that took place here? I had no idea that the Russification process was visible in all sectors - between '53-'55, after the Central Committee decided on the agricultural collectivization, general terror started across the entire society – the peasants were terrorized as they didn't want to give up on their lands and hard work. In my county there were riots and the consequences were dire: deaths, deportations, mass arrests. Stalinism started to dominate our lives' (George, Lines 77 -113)

George also disclosed in the extract above the residual disillusionment and anger that was collectively experienced due the terrifying atmosphere that followed the Central Committee's decision to confiscate the goods of private owners and the deadly punishments, applied to anyone to express of any national spirit or personal values, amongst the peasants or the students alike.

David also revealed the abuse and humiliations that he was subjected to as a result of the purges and the repression that the Communist regime started when he was only a high school student, which culminated with his arrest and four years of imprisonment.

David's tone was sober as he described the discriminatory practices and the nullifying comments that the 'bourgeois elements' were subjected to. His narrative implicitly constructed a solid coherent self, rooted in robust family values; however, there seemed to be a crisis in meaning making and a re-configuration and re-sedimentation of his worldview as he contextualised the climate of terror that the Party instilled at an individual and societal level. The rhetorical function of the narrative was that of comparing and contrasting the cultural values of the pre-communist intellectual elites and the moral foundations of the 'old order' to the ideological constraints imposed by the Regime, the promotion of compliance and the marginalisation of competence.

'*I was a student at Grammar School in Huși and they started the persecution of what they called 'decadent, putrid, bourgeois elements'. We were kicked out of the classroom whenever there were UTM meetings – held between students who unlike us had healthy class origins. We were incessantly abused, insulted as the 'unhealthy' ones. I will never forget the words of an ambitious pseudo politician of the time: 'You are like the potatoes that hang on the edge of a carriage…the carriage moves ahead, and the potatoes fall on the side of the road'. They were saying things that were utterly opposed to the education we had received at home. We went back to our parents feeling all shocked and confused, asking for explanations. They prudently advised…'it is confusing, the political regime is different, but it is what it is…keep your head down and your mouth shut until the wave passes'. I still ended up being arrested for participation in a 'clandestine anti-communist group'. Given my family's social class and background, it was beggars' belief that I would end up arrested.'* (David, Lines 49-60)

The following theme encapsulates the individual and collective responses of the participants to freedom restriction, as well as the consequences deriving for confronting the totalitarian machine and manifesting one's freedom.

4.4.1.3.   *Subordinate Theme: Confronting the Totalitarian Machine*

Whist the first subordinate theme alludes to an awareness of one's freedom, values and identity; there is a more specific subordinate theme that crystallizes in the narrative journey of each participant as the political tensions started to rise. There is a clearly delineated theme of active resistance in the context of the complete instrumentalisation of culture in order to impose and consolidate the totalitarian credo.

These are reflected in the narrators' references to the 'Shield Generation' who, as Ianis explained, reacted promptly and vehemently to the Communist Party's attempts at distorting history and destroying national identity. All of the participants made reference to an intrinsic inalienable freedom as the main catalyst for taking action to oppose the totalitarian ideology and praxis:

'*The discriminatory practices were so visible that our generation- the Shield Generation - had to take a stance, how could we not have reacted – the devaluing of our own values – spiritual values, material values – even history was turned upside down – Roller with his history was saying that our descent line was more Slavic than Romanic…anyways. So practically we didn't feel our freedom wholly anymore, the way we used to feel in our teenage years – and we manifested our right to reclaim what was taken from us. We were inclined like that, we were dreamers, and romantics…. we didn't care about prison or the possible consequences of that because we were already formed in the spirit of freedom. For me the arrest in 1948 was no surprise at all, I expected that*' (Ianis, Lines 72-81).

Ianis described himself as belonging to a generation of '*dreamers, romantics*', stating earlier on that '*it was in my make up to search for a kind of – how should I call it – total freedom*'. He stated that freedom cannot be separated from responsibility if one was to live authentically and in line with their values, pointing out to the dichotomy between existential and political freedom and the primacy of final values over instrumental ones. As he articulated this, I noticed that Ianis's tone became more solemn and proud. In terms of rhetorical function, Ianis seemed to defend and justify the choices of his cohort and the extraordinary strength and endurance they collectively manifested, metaphorically captured in his description of the 'shield generation'.

Throughout Ianis's narrative there was a constant shift between individual and collective self, as he often employed the first-person plural ('we') in order to express personal characteristics

or attitudes. When narrating his desire to take political action, Ianis went on to add: *'we were just people without guns, people who believed and we manifested ourselves discreetly'*, which could be seen as a sign of psycho-social and political solidarity with his generation, but also a desire to give voice to the ones who shared similar experiences and never had the opportunity to be heard.

Echoing Ianis's account, Daniel also positioned himself as a *'dreamer'*, a *'young man with great ideals and expectations'*, alluding to someone who was guided more by their ideals and core values than by practical considerations. He went on to describe his admiration for others who affiliated with the same ideals and expressed his acute desire to actively participate in resistance groups as the only alternative his consciousness embraced. His narrative also constructed a determined patriotic self with deep rooted national-Christian values. There was a strong sense of freedom that accompanied his agentic self -representation, which appeared to have allowed him to find and embrace his meaning in the midst of the general subjugation and disintegration of national identity.

'I felt that my freedom was strangulated… hopelessness soon turned to anger and the need to act, which became acute. I was personally part of a group within which we discussed every action that the new order took, and we soon realized that Romania was on a slippery slope that would end up in total subjugation. We were well aware of how much had been stolen between 1944and 1945, we knew about the set-up of SovRom units which did nothing but exploited the riches of our country. We also knew about how many people had been arrested but we also admired the resistance movements in the mountains and as young lads we could not step back; we had a consciousness, a set of national Christian values, which were strengthening our patriotic feelings'. (Daniel, Lines 52-60)

Luca similarly describes a collective need to resist the russification of the country, the lack of meritocracy and the unfairness of academia, the censorship of media and the overall devaluation of values, which led to him joining the protest after the Hungarian revolution and his arrest:

' … I was an inquisitive and communicative guy…I like sharing ideas with other students about what was going in the country – on November 4th 1956, the Russians entered Budapest on their tanks and had killed thousand… I felt a strong impetus to join the manifestation that was taking place in the University Square, together with other Law students, to show my solidarity and support for the revolution… I was so elated, so moved by their courage... later that day I was called by the Party Committee and arrested ' (Luca, Lines 104-110)

Luca's narrative also constructed an independent and non-conformist self, manifesting his freedom as a matter of action in the world. As with the other narrators, Luca's tone was firm and filled with pride as he described his process of taking stock. Whist his tone was predominantly calm and slow in delivery, I noticed that it became infused with pathos and fast paced as he connected with the memory of his arrest. He embodied this by clenching his fists, breathing heavier and pressing his crossed hands on his chest, which made me think that he was still holding strong emotions about this event, and it still resonated with him on a visceral level. Significant was also his assertion of feeling elated and moved by the courage of other freedom fighters. There was a particular emphasis on the relational and collective self as Luca reflected on the solidarity and communion that he derived from his strong identification with the anti-communist movement.

For all participants, therefore, taking stock and proactively acting against the arbitrary measures imposed by the Communist party, the speedy Sovietization of the country and the annihilation of their basic civil rights was fundamentally an assumed conscious decision that stemmed from a firm belief in their individual freedom, something incompatible with the Communist ideological system. Their taking action was unanimously experienced as authentic, empowering, and congruent with their worldview, providing them with a sense of togetherness and higher purpose.

4.4.2. Major Theme 2: A Painful Journey through the Carceral World

This theme captured the commonalities between narrators with regards to their journey through the infernal carceral prison system, from their arrest, interrogation and trial, through to their sentencing and imprisonment in the different penitentiaries or labour camps built on the model of the Soviet Gulag, and to their final release. All of the participants described this as a painful yet meaningful journey of self-discovery and personal transformation, a non-linear search for a higher purpose - fragmented, then reconfigured, buried then unearthed, lost only to be rediscovered.

All acknowledged the traumatic nature of their carceral experiences and how these shaped their identities during and after their incarceration. Recognizing and acknowledging the crisis and trauma associated with their imprisonment and the post release years served as an antecedent to grown and a reconfiguration of meaning for the participants. By retracing their journeys and

the emotional pain tied to them, participants pulled back perspective and were able to delineate between the existential thrownness brought by the socio-political context they were immersed in and their sense of identity and ontological rootedness. According to the narrators, this acknowledgement helped them cope with the acute psychological distress that they were subjected to and rise above challenges, providing a basis upon which they were able to integrate past trauma and regain their freedom in relation to adversity.

The journey through the Gulag and the carceral chronotope was depicted in multi-layered fields of existence, including the physical, personal, social and spiritual dimension. When telling their detention stories, all of the participants started from the details of the physical dimension: the visual interdictions, sleep deprivations, the beatings and tortures, the cold, the hunger, the lack of clothing and poor hygiene were abundant in their accounts. The personal dimension was occupied with the dynamics of solitude and the longing for one' former life or projection into the future, oscillating between courage and discouragement, hope and despair, in an ongoing process of formation, fragmentation and reconfiguration of the self. When it came to the social dimension, specificities and details were sacrificed to convey a greater picture of collective communion in suffering. One of the most frequent strategies of detail suppression was the use of a recurrent 'all' in designating the prisoners' in-group, which was portrayed as a world of unity and harmony, as opposed to the apocalyptic carceral world where they found themselves.

The spiritual dimension was where all the participants' testimonies converged. This narrative layer was mostly occupied with intellectual or artistic aspirations (learning philosophy or foreign languages, creating stories, songs or poems to share with the in-group), taking part in collective prayer or illicit liturgies. The first subtheme will detail how the participants managed the physical space and the resources they tapped to on a personal level in order to cope with trauma and crisis, whereas the following two will elaborate on the social and spiritual layers.

4.4.2.1. *Subordinate Theme: Narrativizing Trauma (Unremitting Torture)*

This subtheme explained the quality of their encounters with the terrifying methods of systematic physical and psychological torture applied by the Communist Regime to the opposition, from the time of arrest, inquisition and trial, through to their imprisonment within the Communist carceral system in Romania until their release, and sometimes beyond that.

The story of the inhumane treatment and conditions experienced is forcefully told by the narrators, as well as direct and indirect accounts of the notorious Pitești Experiment with its Re-Education process generalised later on to other prisons and labour camps, exposing the diabolical methods used in order to impose Communist ideology on the students. Some examples of such tortures offered by the participants included putting prisoners in complete darkness or heavily lit rooms, locking them in coffin like cells for days, depriving them of sleep and medical treatment, starving them, overworking them in extreme weather conditions, and applying diabolical torture methods to break them physically and psychologically.

Ianis was the only one who was experimented and flesh-witnessed the Pitești experiment and its 're-education', a new method of systematic physical and psychological torture and brainwashing aimed to destroy political opponents and prevent the spread of any anti-communist ideas in the post war generation. The ultimate goal was for the imprisoned freethinking students to be tortured and forced to denounce others political dissidents and 'enemies' of the regime still at liberty during interrogation, only to then coerce them to became torturers themselves, accomplices to the horrors and abuses inflicted on their friends and colleagues.

Ianis's narrative accounts synthetized a comprehensive picture of the Pitești experiment, describing the inhumane conditions of the camps aimed at the extermination and complete alienation of the self, the weakening and destruction of one's values and beliefs and the implementation of the new ideology through a unique experiment which the Communists named 're-education'.

Ianis' story about the Pitești experiment starts in a composed, neutral tone where he provided factual data regarding the number of students imprisoned in Pitești between 1949 and 1952, after which he directly asked me whether I had read any literature about the Pitești phenomenon. I wondered whether the question came in order to test whether I was prepared or invested enough to fully receive his story of torture and pain. I confirmed that I read Dumitru Bacu's book The *Anti-Humans*; Ianis identified the author as a family relative and someone who he shared his detention experience with, and I noted that his tone became more jovial and prouder as he disclosed this allegiance, after which he continued:

'*…some called it re-education through torture; others called it the Pitești experiment or the Pitești Phenomenon… the crude reality though was that this was no experiment, but the mere brutal massacring of Romanian students' (Ianis, Lines 164-166)*

From the start, Ianis positioned his discourse against the canonical narrative of Communist nostalgia by referring to the strict prohibitions to divulge the horrors and unspeakable abuses that were witnessed in Pitești, as well as pointing out to the government's secrecy about the large-scale extermination of Romanian students. The rhetorical function was that of compare and contrast between the superficial yet common public framing and reduction of brutal torture to the scale of an '*experiment*' or '*phenomenon*', and his first-hand experience of it as a '*massacre*'. Following on from this, there was an immediate shift towards a sober tone tinged with sadness as Ianis started to develop his narrative of the unprecedented brutality and cruelty of the 'experiment':

'*… we were urged to go and mix with others in order to detect all the enemies of the regime, particularly amongst the detainees – once they found these people out, they isolated them. They mostly sent them to Pitești in order to be re-educated...that is where most of the crimes took place...some of us resisted, others committed suicide, others lost their minds...and most of them were killed; my make-up was different, though...I could not allow to be beaten up by a fellow prisoner ...when I first got there and I was told to ‚confess' my sins, they took me into this huge room, room number 1, in which there must have been about 40 students...when I entered it I soon realised that something was not quite right...nobody said a word to me and there was a heaviness in the air...the prisoners looked swollen in the face, but others looked quite confident and relaxed – this was the so called Leading Committee, I was to find out later. They just observed at first...'*

R: Were these the guards?

P: No, that's the thing... they were prisoners themselves, colleagues of ours

R: I see...so they were part of a Leading Committee?

P: Yes, they were prisoners just like us...but had turned into torturers…' (Ianis, Lines 185-200)

As he moved closer to describing the setting of Pitești prison and the consequences of re-education through torture, Ianis' narrative positioning to the audience and in relation to the other prisoners who '*lost their minds, committed suicide or were killed'* constructed a self which '*was of a different make up – I didn't accept to be tortured by a fellow prisoner'* (*Ianis, Lines 189-190*).

The nature of the Pitești experiment – where prisoners were forced to turn into torturers themselves – created several levels of narrative positioning for Ianis in relation to the others

within the reported events, as the lines between perpetrators and victims became significantly blurred. To start with, Ianis constructed an idealist self-representation, audaciously facing up to the re-educators and assiduously trying to deconstruct Macarenko's pedagogical principles, naively hoping for an honest philosophical debate. The discursive function of his story here seemed to be that of justifying the incompatibility between the prisoners of conscience's values and backgrounds and the criminals and delinquents targeted by Macarenko's theory. Following the brutal beatings that he had endured at the hands of fellow students, Ianis repositioned himself to the audience as a realist, whose temporary conscious non - action was grounded in his realistic acceptance of the limitations to his own agency under the atrocious circumstances of the Pitești experiment. Whist he retained his sense of wholeness and integrity, Ianis grounded his decision not to keep his head down and not fight the re-educators in a position of authoritative realism, agentively stepping out of what was happening:

'… after a day they came to me and asked if I agreed with the process of ‚re-education' …I was ready to provide an answer, since I was a Philosophy student… I was well familiar with pedagogic readings and started challenging Macarenko's principles… Makarenko had been a Soviet pedagogue who dealt with thieves, rapists and criminals…. they might have been more easily re-educated through hard labour and beatings, but… we had firm beliefs and values, we had ideals… I told them that it was virtually impossible for this to happen since we weren't aware of what we had done wrong and we didn't think that Communism as a system had a future…. I didn't get the chance to finish my sentence…all of them jumped on me and beat me to the point of unconsciousness. This was naturally a heavy shock for me… The following day I found myself again amongst 40 detainees, all colleagues of mine, all students…and I couldn't believe what they had done to me… I felt embarrassed and humiliated…. I thought to myself that they beat me up and I didn't even take a stance, I didn't say anything back… I made a fool of myself.

R: In what way did you experience that?

P: I felt betrayed… I looked around me and I had no clue that they knew what was going to happen to me… the whole ‚re-education' phenomenon was of course a smokescreen, the beatings were horrendous and the torture strategies were diversified according to the prisoner's ability to fight back… I didn't want to fight back… I thought to myself "This is pointless… I don't want to die here, the right to life is not my decision… I first have to ask God then my parents, why sacrifice… to become a hero? Heroism is meaningless under the circumstances… One can never be judged under abnormal circumstances. Any declaration that is taken under pressure cannot be classified as 'real'… temporary failings belong to

someone who still has a creed and has yet to find the meaning of their lives' (Ianis, 201-226).

The narrator employed the rhetorical function of justification, sharing his experience of overcoming trauma and crisis within a fragmented universe where all meaning collapsed. Ianis's tone was peaceful, yet determined, as he talked about his decision to 'stop fighting', robotically accept the new ideology and the absurd *mis-en-scene* of Pitești penitentiary.

When I asked about what his personal experience of detention in Pitești, Ianis shook his head vehemently and said, '*I just can't say*'. Despite me attempting again and trying to provide a relational home for Ianis, he chose not to share that part of his story with me. According to Nelson and Horowitz (2001) the function of avoiding narration is related to a default self-protective cognitive manoeuvrer by which individuals can engage with the task of 'telling about' painful memories without actually reliving them. On reflection, I thought that Ianis demonstrated good self-care given the limitations of the research interview setting and that revisiting potentially unprocessed trauma memories could have triggered strong emotional and physical responses that would have otherwise been difficult to contain. I also got the feeling that he attempted to protect me from vicarious traumatization as a result of his first-hand account of the most horrific torture methods that were applied in Pitești; however, he did insist I re-read Dumitru Bacu's seminal book on the phenomenon The *Anti-Humans* and specified that him and the author shared a cell together, which I thought was his way of providing a factual answer without allowing any ripples of disruption expand in our intersubjective space. The 'unspeakability' of the Pitesti victims and their refusal to depict the unimaginable abuses inflicted upon them directly but to speak through the voices of others was seen as a direct effect of 'witnessing horrorism' and an unwillingness to relieve traumatic memories that surpass the average human capacity to bear affective states (Ionescu, 2019).

David also described the unremitting nature of torture in the Romanian Communist Gulag, identifying traumatic experiences of physical and psychological torture within the labour camps, which were additionally exacerbated by the cruelty of the guards and the extreme weather conditions.

'*On 6 May 1950 we were arrested by the Romanian State Security and sent to prison by the Military Tribunal. The leader of our group got the biggest sentence – 6 years. Although I didn't do anything special, I was condemned to four years of prison. Why, might you ask me? My origins were considered terribly 'unhealthy' by the Communists – my father, who*

had recently returned from Paris, refused to become prefect and align with Communist ideas, which annoyed them terribly. As a result, I had to be brainwashed and taught the 'right way' through more drastic methods than they ones applied to other prisoners. I endured the worst tortures that were practiced in the Communist prisons, most of them invented and trialled in the 'Pitești Phenomenon', and then widely used in Gherla prison and the Peninsula labour camps. I will never forget the cruelty of the Regime's torture methods. In Galati we were met by commander Goiciu, a harbour weightlifter by trade. He used to hit us constantly and whip our backs until we bled if we gave an answer that he didn't like. The guards were acting like beasts… they would strike our backs 20 or 30 times above what was ordered, just to prove that they were competent and 'fierce'. In Galati prison we spent a whole winter eight people in one cell. We only had a tiny window, and the glass was broken. We had nothing but summer clothes on and had nowhere to sleep…'
(David, Lines 82-97)

David's painful journey through the Gulag was exacerbated by the background of his 'unhealthy 'family origins, which attracted the infliction of more drastic punishments on him. In the extract below he described his journey through the labour camps and how he moved form a place of aloneness, chaos and fragmentation to a more coherent hopeful state. David positioned himself a 'stubborn' individual, with inner coherence and integrity, able to withstand his pain and trying to draw lessons from it. The narrative brought to the fore both the individual and a collective selves; David identified himself with the in-group's shared attributes as one of the 'rebels', the ones who had the backbone and courage to step forward and own their choices. For Sedikides and Brewer (2011) the collective self illuminates on those conceptual representations of the self that delineate in-group members from outgroups. Similar to the other participants, David's account of traumatic experiences showed interplay of self-representations which could be conceived as complementary; there were times in his narrative when the individual self-became primary and subsumed the collective self, like in the extract below:

'When I got to the labour camp in Poarta Alba and Peninsula I got to know the famous brigade H1, which was led by all the re-educated students from Pitești. They all claimed that they finally awakened to the good that the New Order brought – and they were trying to apply the same cruel methods on us the 'rebels'. Since I was quite stubborn from the start, I was amongst the most persecuted – I was woken up in the middle of the night, asked to stand up and keep my arms above my head straight…they used to hit me systematically, shouting abuse and urging me to change my views and embrace the working-class ideology. They used to beat me up until they got tired, and then lock me naked in a dark cell. I felt so alone…I was a broken man, completely demolished physically

and psychologically, for 6 months we got only one mug of water in the evening, and we didn't wash for six months. We used to drink water from puddles if we got lucky…and many of us got terribly ill. What is important in all of this is that at the end of my 4 years of detention I was just as 'un-educated' as I was when they arrested me. Just as trusting in my youth and my values. I kept on hoping that through work and honesty I would manage to get the system to accept me or at least to tolerate me…' (*David, Lines 427 -440*)

In his recounting of past memories of inhumane beatings and deprivations, David's tone became pessimistic and unsteady, as he crossed his arms across his chest and hugged his shoulders, which I thought was an embodiment of his need for grounding, but also indicative of the strong sense of aloneness and deep sadness that his carceral experience brought to the fore. Interestingly, I soon noted that his demeanour became lighter, and his tone regained its gravitas as he emphasised how his breakdown led to a breakthrough as he discovered his true grit and toughness in enduring adversity in his life. There was great pride behind the fact that his values remained unshattered and he did not betray his worldview, underlying the pivotal role played by an internal locus of control in building resilience and overcoming crisis (Connor, 2006). Significant also was his latter assertion according to which he had hope that he would *get* the system *to accept him* and somehow find a place of belonging and integration. Considering this against the fact that the Communist Party experimented with the most diabolical methods in their attempt to re-educate David, this felt for me like a very hopeful narrative, one that transcended fragmentation and oriented himself towards meaning.

Just like David, George had experienced some of the most horrifying systematic tortures used to breakdown the integrity and selfhood of the prisoner. Below, he described one of his many torturous experiences:

'*Once they sent us to Salcia I realised that we were sent there with a clear purpose: to never return... We were six people in two beds, the guards terrorized us, and we had to build a pier of 27 km, 10 meters tall, to surround Brăila's sea.... I often had to choose between doing my norm and getting beaten up and I chose the latter...another inmate, doctor by trade, told us that getting beaten up burnt less calories than 12h of labouring on the pier, so I took the beatings...there were 100 of us in a room and four rows of beds; it was so hot that the walls were permanently wet and the smell of the buckets filled with human dejections was unbearable... so many of us died...* (*George, Lines 304-312*)

'*I remember one time the Adventists refused to go to work on Saturday, as it was their holly day...it was in November. They asked them to take all of their clothes off and took*

them to a fallow ground full of thorny prickly plants – which are extremely painful to the touch. They asked them to crawl through these and were brought back to the labour camp, all naked, full of mud and blood – a cavalry Dantesque scene, cut from a horror movie: imagine a row of naked bodies covered in mud and dripping fresh blood.... we witnessed certain things that would make many people lose their minds...' (George, Lines 399-408)

Just like with the other participants, the main emphasis was on the collective self and the extermination agenda that the Regime had for the camp prisoner; the physical dimension and the somatic constraints were dominant elements in the storytelling process - the malnutrition, exposure to disease, beatings and relentless labouring emphasised the gargantuan challenges the prisoners had to face in order to manage the carceral space. I found George's precision with numbers remarkably interesting within the narrative of trauma – I wondered whether the provision of factual information was a cognitive strategy to avoid connecting wholly with the traumatic memories, alongside with the prominence of the collective self. The only time when the individual self-stood out in this section of the interview was when George shared the vicarious trauma narrative of witnessing the torture of the Adventists for refusing to work on Saturday. As he vividly described this, I noticed that the emotional temperature increased and George consistently touched/pushed his chest area, whist his speech became more slurred, and he defocused his gaze.

In my reflective journal I made a note that I experienced a similar closing-in in my upper torso as the vicarious trauma material emerged within the intersubjective story telling space between George and myself and I became aware of an increased difficulty to catch my breath. The way in which we both engaged and responded to the extermination agenda of the regime made me think of the embodied experience of oppression and its legacy, and the ways in which George's somatic response resided in me, too as unease, constriction and numbness. As a practitioner, it made me think that part of the task of learning from the experience of oppression must imply becoming more attuned to the non-verbal component of our interactions, recognizing them as extraordinarily complex, fluid and contextualised – and reclaiming the body is understood as both a personal and a political act (Johnson, 2009).

Similarly, Christian also evoked a powerful vivid description of the humiliations that he had to endure and the diabolical pain induction methods of the guards. From a linguistic perspective, the pauses and the long sighs that punctuated his account were indicative of the traumatizing effect of the events recounted. As with the other participants, I noted a deceleration in his speech

and body movements which emphasised a notably emotive segment of the narrative. Christian's moves became more prolonged as he described the scene of when he was made to cut reed with his teeth and humiliated in front of everybody. He then shifted to a collective representation of the self and went on to narrate other vicarious traumatic experiences in the aftermath of his direct confrontation with degradation, dehumanization and death.

'I would like to share one of the worst memories that I have from the Danube Delta... we were working on the cornfields and there was too much reed, suffocating the corn crops – we had to be really careful when cutting reed, to make sure that we didn't mistake it for corn... anyways, one day I somehow missed a strand of reed and the guard saw that; he came straight up to me and asked me to explain myself.... I told him I must have overlooked it, but before I even finished my sentence he started carrying me punches and hitting me in the back until he brought me to tears and I got me on my knees. He then urged me to cut in with my teeth and forced me to do that in front of the whole brigade. This was only one of the humiliations I had to endure there. To add to that, we had to drink water straight from the Danube and all of us got dysentery... we were aligned in the morning and were made to walk for 10 miles to get to the cornfields. If we needed the toilet, they would never stop the column, so we had to soil ourselves and witness our inmates do the same... there was blood in our faeces as we were all terribly ill, but nobody stopped. If we did, they would shoot us dead. It was beyond degrading… we were completely stripped out of our humanity, reduced to nothing, barren lives... I saw so many dead in Periprava, they used to drop out like flies on the fields or in the camps... at night, the guards would put all the bodies in a horse cart and ditch them in a pit hole... (*sobbing)' *(Christian, Lines 321-356)*

The above reflections from Christian provide further insight into the physiological and psychological degradations that the prisoners were subjected to and how this eroded their very core humanity and sense of self. Prolonged exposure to traumatic events can result not only in experiential disruptions within the individual's inner world (amnesia, dissociation, constriction, neurophysiological alterations) but also fragmentation/loss of identity and one's sense of self (Melius, 2013). According to Arendt (1951), the ultimate aim of totalitarian regimes is that of transforming the human nature itself through the inexorable experience of terror and horror. The dehumanisation of prisoners meant reducing them to a set of conditional reflexes - Pavlovian dogs that have been completely stripped of their humanity. There was a strong contrast between Christian's narrativisation of psychological numbness and dissociation and

his powerful emotional response to this memory in the interview, together with my affective mirroring of this.

I felt that the intersubjective space was very loaded with affect, and I noticed that I wanted to ask a different question or divert Christian's attention to something else as it was hard to contain and tolerate due to an increased tightness in my chest and a sudden light-headedness that made me feel entrapped and ungrounded. In hindsight, I am pleased that I stayed with that, and I provided him with what Storolow (2007) called a 'relational home'. According to his existential conceptualisation, trauma is constituted in an intersubjective context in which severe emotional pain cannot be held. I felt that the interviewing experience constituted a context in which Christian was felt safe enough to share painful emotional content and trusted that this was understood and contained, and thus integrated into his experience.

4.4.2.2. *Subordinate Theme: Coping with Adversity (The Power of Being – with)*

Within all six co -researcher narratives, a major shared theme emerged around resilience and coping with the traumatic experiences within the carceral universe of the Romanian Gulag. Though participants spoke of and made sense of their coping strategies in idiosyncratic ways, all of them referred to an increased sense of resilience and growth as a result.

All six participants unanimously described a powerful sense of 'being-with' others and referred to human connectedness as a pivotal constituent in their journeys through the carceral world. This subcategory emerged as the participants expressed the power of shared trauma, and how their being with others led to feeling more acceptant of their fate. In the participants' accounts of collective suffering, themes of need for connectedness and optimism surfaced frequently, where staying positive and instilling hope in others were central to their coping.

With regards to how this interrelatedness was manifested within the prison walls, all the participants described shared experiences of storytelling, poetry, singing and humour as invaluable coping strategies which acted as a powerful buffer against the pervasive deprivations and humiliations that they had to face on a daily basis. These individual and collective coping strategies helped them to withstand the absurdity and monotony of their daily existence in the Gulag.

The solidarity among the prisoners provided a cushioning effect through which they were able to stand together more firmly and hold on to their beliefs and values through shared stories,

which strengthened their physical and emotional well-being. Daniel's account cogently exemplified this:

'Everyone was scared of tuberculosis, since it was widely spread, and the work conditions were terribly difficult. The cold weather made the infection so much more unbearable. When I found out I had it I felt hopeless…I ended up in a room full of 'inept workers' who were just as ill as I was, if not worse… there were about 50-60 of us and they just left us there…as they knew we had little hope to live. This gave us time to talk between ourselves, to tell our stories …and share whatever we wanted to share – I started telling them some of my stories, I talked to them about astronomy and other knowledge I had…and this very act of sharing instilled us with hope, it gave us more meaning…it made the burden so much more bearable.'(Daniel , Lines 248- 259)

The strong sense of interconnection with others and openness expressed in Daniel's account emerged against a background of increased vulnerability and confrontation with the limits of existence by the prisoners, which seemed to have illuminated the value of Being more and provided them a collective sense of purpose.

Similarly to Daniel, Ianis emphasized social support as the main source of resilience within the prisoners' experiences of trauma and adversity. Ianis used the metaphor of the 'striped uniform' as an umbrella term to delineate the in-group from the brutal antagonist Regime, describing a lessening in the intensity of the suffering as a result of it being shared and carried collectively; the experience of nurturing relationship seemed to have made the pain more bearable and meaningful, helping they move beyond the destructive relational template of the Communist Agenda. Interestingly, Ianis also linked this togetherness to an enhanced sense of ultimate freedom, despite the severe restrictions of liberty and relentless abuses they were subjected to before, during and after detention.

'I definitely have it. Because I can express myself. And do you know when I experience it totally? Whenever I meet my former detention brothers, over a glass of wine or at different events. I feel myself; I feel at home. Because the reason why prison was bearable for me was the fact that there were thousands of people… and all the burden and the sufferance seemed to be refracted on and shared by all of us. It was transfigured. And we coped a lot easier because there in prison we all looked alike… there were those stripes we were wearing that levelled all of us… collective suffering.' (Ianis, Lines 556-574)

George also underlined the paradoxical contrast between the strong psychological impact that

his traumatic experiences of incarceration had on him and the 'peak experiences' of pure joy and freedom that he reached through connecting with others in that immense suffering:

'*Although for some it might be something difficult to grasp rationally, (imprisonment)… instilled a strong fear in my psyche…subconsciously I presume. Twenty years after my release and I was having night terrors and flashbacks about prison every day… nevertheless, I have to admit that I found moments of absolute pure joy and freedom in that Hell - I don't think I have ever laughed as hard as I did with my comrades in prison… it was a young environment, and we knew each other well, we supported each other… overtime they mixed us up and we lost touch… but with every new transfer there were other people to meet, new opportunities…' (George, Lines 439-446)*

The collective self-identity proved to be the primary most salient self- construct amongst the participants' narrativisation on this thematic category, supporting conceptualisation of collectivism as a construct in which in-group versus out-group identification was pivotal and the motivations of the in-group took precedence over individual needs.

Christian described the central role of poetry in the act collective bonding of the prisoners, as an expression of human solidarity, a profound cathartic process, an act of both spiritual transcendence and communication and mental fitness. In the excerpt below, he offered a detailed description of '*the language of the walls'* and its role in maintaining the prisoners' morale, and how poems were communicated from prisoner to prisoner and memorized using the Morse code. Listening to the walls seemed to have offered Christian a tangible escape from his daily suffering and the torment of solitude, as he became a member of the prison community, a 'carrier' of shared meaning:

'*We had developed a means to communicate in writing... we figured out that if you put some soap on the sole of a boot and mixed it up with some chalk form the walls you could scribble things down using a needle, or something really thin like a bone... and we were able to write some poems down, which others would memorize. Writing was forbidden, however. Poetry was the main vehicle... I learnt some poems off by heart that I can still remember today. There is a poem by Sergiu Mandilescu called „Amen'. Could I please recite it to you?*
By all means, I would love to hear it!
{clearing voice}: Amen: a poem by Sergiu Mandinescu. Before I start, just to give you a bit of background, this poem describes the beginning of the ‚re-education' movement in Pitești. Other participants might have mentioned this to you when you interviewed them...

about Turcanu and his so-called re-education, as well as other teams of re-educators that ended up at the Canal, such as Enachescu and Bogdanescu

R: (nodding)

P: firstly, the poems were mentally composed and memorised by their very author, who would recite them in front of others...these would then memorize them in turn and whenever a prisoner was transferred from one prison to another, he would bring along the poems with him ...this is how poetry travelled from prison to prison

It sounds like there was a permanent hidden communication...

Hidden indeed... and then in Gherla there were the pipes which never really worked, but they kept them nevertheless in every cell... and we used a modified version of the Morse alphabet... even today I find myself beating it sometimes, A was 3 beats, B was 4 beats, a line involved two points right after another...

R: and this is how you communicated with others?

P: yes, indeed

R: Can you still remember this alphabet?

P: Yes, I course I still do... it might be a bit rusty after almost 60 years, but it stayed with me... there were some of us who were more skilled and tapped faster. You also had to be a good receiver and tap that you received after each word... but there was a permanent hunt from the guards who were on the lookout, and we had to hide and make sure that we wouldn't get caught.

R: What was it that you communicated?

P: It was mainly poems... but let me go back to this poem that I was mentioning earlier called Amen... I hope I can remember it accurately. This is how it goes:

If I only had an angel's quill
and the dark ink of night
perhaps only then I might
gather from all my vagaries
to write my memories
telling why I'm bleeding, I will.

Plundered stars of the night.
At the window of Hope – irons tight.
At the door of Salvation – the lock.

Our pale face, asleep on the block.

As the hatred breaks out, all its dark flame will sweep
in a split second, the fire will wring
our mind, soul and wing,
our ashes piled high, in a heap.

When the terrible hammers will shatter the silence
to pieces, as great as the penance,
our broken-up souls will be reaching the sky,
as the martyrs will burn on the pyre, up high.

Such terrible grief and the beatings of kind
caused so many inmates to have shattered their mind
as a great many more for eternity strive
from the ones who've been there, just the dead are alive.

Just like him and like you, I am only a bloke:
see, My Lord? I do walk and I talk
as a true living corpse my existence is bare
I am ready, My Lord, to be taken up there.
I embrace all the pain and the anguish I merit
as I wait to be called by the heralds of Heaven
in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
Amen. (Christian, Lines 516-585) [4]

As he set to recite the poem, Christian tone became very solemn and serious. I noticed he had tears in his eyes and his posture became straighter, as he rested his right hand on his chest. In my post interview notes I referred to the fact that it was as if he was simultaneously reciting this poem to an invisible audience of prison inmates with whom he connected deeply, syntonic with the representation of a collective self-identity.

According to Wrotham (2000), autobiographical narrators can partly construct themselves drawing on the interactional as well as the representational functions of language. The rhetorical function of his narrative positioned Christian as someone who wished to continue to give testimony and keep alive the story of the Communist prisons by drawing attention to the

---

[4] Translated into English from the Romanian original by Constantin Roman, London, 2012, Copyright Constantin ROMAN

're-education 'process in Pitești prison – the epitome of the Regime's extermination agenda, a slow-death of relentless abuses and humiliations of the worst imaginable kind. For Christian, the relational and collective selves were intertwined, and he presented a highly relational memory by sharing one of the poems he had learnt in prison. Through the very act of reciting the poem to me as a co-participant, I felt that Christian positioned himself interactionally in the storytelling event as the active carrier of the poem, investing me with the role of the receiver and potential conveyor of narrativized pain. I felt deeply moved by his ritualistic re-enactment of the poem and noticed a strong sense of connection with my research, as well as an overarching sense of responsibility to preserve and share my participants' stories in a way that does them justice. I also noted an impulse to narrow the space between the Christian and myself, moving inwards from the midline of my body, alongside with my awareness to withhold this desire and preserve the space as it was, in an attempt to hold it more solidly and give it permanence.

In the same vein, Daniel described the spirit of communion that was present within the inept tuberculosis-stricken inmates and the power of storytelling in lifting the human spirit as an antidote to hopelessness:

'*When I found out I had it(tuberculosis) I felt hopeless… I ended up in a room full of 'inept workers' who were just as ill as I was, if not worse… there were about 50-60 of us and they just left us there… as they knew we had little hope to live…. This gave us time to talk between ourselves, to tell our stories … and share whatever we wanted to share – I started telling them some of my stories, I talked to them about astronomy and other knowledge I had…and this very act of sharing instilled us with hope, it gave us more meaning… it made the burden so much more bearable… and time passed quicker… and we forgot about where we were… (smiling*) we lived in a real brotherhood there*' (Daniel, Lines 250 -265)

In the above extract Daniel is echoing the other participants' accounts that illuminated the act of bearing witness and holding each other's stories as a form of witnessing and holding each other existentially. Through the act of storytelling, David felt that he became known both to others and to himself, finding purpose and understanding through the story-telling process.[5]

---

[5] A narrative process is one where a speaker connects events and occurrences in a sequential way that has meaning and implications for future action and for the meanings that speaker wants a listener to take away (Riessman, 2008). Often, this process provides a sense of purpose or belonging that can encourage others to remember, engage and act (Riessman, 2008). Therefore, a narrative is made up of these intentionally selected, organized, and connected events that the speaker deems as meaningful for that audience, and in this way, a narrative can 'reveal truths about human experience' (Riessman, 2008: p. 10).

The cultural world became a refuge and legitimated the sufferings and the horrors of the prison years. All the narrators attributed their survival to a permanent cultural exchange between cellmates, where the private-public carceral space gained a spiritual function, transforming their experience and transposing it outside temporality and spatiality. This refocusing on meaning-laden cultural and/or spiritual activities and the suspension of their everyday carceral chronotope was mentioned by all the interviewees as a core element to their coping.

4.4.2.3.   *Subordinate Theme: The Primacy of the Transcendent*

According to Van Deurzen and Arnold-Baker (2005) central to the spiritual dimension is what we find or make meaningful, the values and beliefs we adhere to being the foundations on which our worldview is built. It is very difficult to explain how people endured, survived and overcame the trauma of the Gulag. There are, however, some things to be understood from the narratives of the six participants I interviewed. All the testimonies had very strong ethical underpinning, whereby living was both an ontic and an axiological struggle. For David, not betraying his colleagues by giving in under torture was fundamentally a question of moral impossibility. His integrity and sense of wholeness rendered him with a solid sense of inner coherence throughout his ordeals, constituting a powerful buffer against trauma (Connor, 2006; Meichenbaum, 2012).

'*How could I have given in the people I cared about? When I was a child, if my sister broke a vase and I told my mum about her misdemeanour I remember fondly that I always got into trouble for telling. She used to tell her off of doing what she did but disproved of my behaviour, too…I carried this lesson on loyalty with me throughout my life' (David, Lines 24-28)*

In the following account Ianis also refers to suffering as *amor fati, the* stoic acceptance of an *implacable* destiny which would eventually be worth all the pain. When asked what the thing that helped him was most to put up with the sufferings and humiliations in Pitești, Gherla and Aiud, Ianis stated that:

'*To me the most important factor was the connection with the Divine... I thought to myself that Christ had suffered so much and ultimately overcame all pain and won... I wasn't comparing myself to Christ in anyway, I just held on to this principle... secondly, it was the love for my family and the desire to be reunited.' (Ianis, 333-336)*

His strong belief in God and the hope to be reunited with his loved ones provided Ianis with a strong sense of meaning, allowing him to transcend the walls of his cell and cultivate a resilient mind-set.

In addition, the relational representation of the self was of primary salience in how the participants constructed their stories of survivorship. The accounts were abundant with relational references or imagery conveying the narrators' feelings and actions as derived mainly from their interpersonal relationship and their motivation to protect or enhance their significant others.

All of the narrators exhibited a deep faith in God and connection with the Divine, allocating a big part of their narratives to a detailed description of Christian customs and rituals around praying, fasting, attending improvised liturgies and celebrating Christmas/Easter before, during and after their imprisonment. They all expressed an immutable belief that solace and justice would ultimately be restored to them through numinous intervention.

For Luca, faith and prayer were described as the main source of resilience and coping mechanisms whilst in isolation:

'*At the beginning it was the terror…the fear that we'd never make it out of there…we were treated so badly that there was no hope they'd let us our any time soon or that we'd make it our alive. As time passed, I started thinking about my childhood, about my faith – as a child I used to have religion lessons in primary school between year one to year four… the ones born in '37 we had regular catechism classes with a priest once a week, Father Manel from Băilești… so I had some concepts related to faith. And I started thinking, particularly through the terror of the inquisitions that my only hope was in God. I gradually started praying at night, in silence. I can honestly say that my faith in God was my support and the only thing that stopped me from losing my mind. I knew that God would take care of me…and this is what I used to say in my prayers: 'God, please take care of me'… as well as 'God, please take care of my loved ones'. (Luca, Lines 265-274)*

Christian also referred to the role of spiritual beliefs in helping him and other prisoners to cope whist incarcerated. When asked what helped him cope with the adverse conditions of prison he firmly replied:

'*Youth and my faith in God…I remember that around Christmas we all felt the warmth and the soul of the celebration, we felt joy and a certain elation, spiritual growth and a sense*

of freedom if you like... I fondly remember the meaningful sermon of a priest during one Christmas eve...who told us how our Lord Jesus Christ, despite all of the trials and tribulations that he endured came to save us, and we will also be saved through our suffering and faith in God.' (Christian, 433-438)

In studying the account of imprisoned women in the Romanian Gulag, Ursa (2008) linked their endurance to a phenomenon which she labels the 'dislocation of the aggressor'. Instead of conceiving their aggressors as guilty against themselves, most of these survivors thought of them as guilty against God first and so they displaced the whole idea of fighting back, judging and punishing them at a greater level. Similarly, the participants I interviewed expressed an implicit trust in a divine intervention when it came to punishing their aggressors. When asked what helped him withstand the precarious prison conditions, David stated that:

'*The only thing was the desire to come out and be free...I am not a vengeful person but even if they condemned me to 20 years in prison I would have done still mobilized all of my resources to come out... that was my aim, I knew not to dig my own hole so to speak – I am a Christian, I turn the other cheek once, but not twice... deep down I knew that God will take care of me and will reward us according to our deeds... I felt free when I was locked up because I knew they could kill me but never convince me or re-educate me.'* (*David, Lines 233-238*)

For David, the spiritual dimension was present throughout the interview as an implicit guiding force, strongly intertwined with the personal sphere and his sense of self. Despite the tortures that he was subjected to throughout his four-year Gulag ordeal, despite being abandoned by his fiancée after a prolonged period of ill health and having lost his son in a tragic drowning accident, he surprisingly concluded:

'*God has been a lot kinder to me than I could have ever imagined... I managed to graduate from Law School, I travelled the world...I had a meaningful life and most importantly I managed to retain my freedom... looking back, I couldn't have wished for more'.* (*David, Lines 398-400*)

There was an implicit understanding that even the most excruciating suffering that people experience can be transformed through making it meaningful, even though this is not always an easy task and we have limited control over the course of our destiny; confrontation with trauma can have seismic devastating effects, but it can also help people tap into their strengths,

find their grit and new possibilities. According to Tedeschi & Calhoun (1995) posttraumatic growth is both a process and an outcome, whereby people can experience positive changes in themselves as a result of their struggle with traumatic event.

The *amor fati* theme and the uncompromising acceptance of reality for what it is were also strongly present in George's account:

'*Many of us died, too many – but this was hard to establish at the time as there were 1200 of us crammed in 3 barracks – one on top of the other. The ones which made it were the young, the healthy, the ones who had no special attachments outside the prison, especially the ones who didn't have a family – as family men had a double burden to carry, prison itself and the worries about the well-being of their loved ones – but anyway, I am not the only one who made it out of there. I am not sure… I was an atheist back then, I discovered faith later when I got to Gherla and I met a Greco-catholic priest who baptised me…but whilst I was in Salcia what helped me cope was the refusal to work and mainly the will to live, which was strangely combined with an acceptance of the fact that there was nothing I could do about this, that I was at the hands of Fate and that despite my fight I had no guarantee of success, of coming out victorious… and that was bizarrely comforting'* (George, Lines 336-347)

According to Van Deurzen and Arnold-Baker (2005) it is not infrequent that people discover that certain life events – even though traumatic at the time – can make them re-evaluate their beliefs and challenge their views of themselves, others and the world. In the excerpt above, the shattering of his assumptive world and the seismic effect of his Gulag detention seem to have led George to more insight and wisdom and a reconfiguration of spiritual values, which was epitomised in his spiritual conversion from atheism during his carceral ordeal.

Similarly to George, Daniel also described his faith and spiritual communion as pivotal in his survival and endurance. In terms of self-representation, the individual, relational and collective aspects of the self-appeared to co-exist and merge – as the narrator alternated between 'we' and 'I"; within the collective framework there was a clear demarcation of the in-group from the outgroup (guards); however, this seemed to be secondary to a relational construction of the self, both horizontally (with the priest) and vertically (with God).

'*At one of my lowest points I met Father Constantin Sârbu... he had 8 years to serve and came from the Canal… he completely renewed us spiritually, we started saying prayers and he was carrying out the liturgies – there was one moment that I remember at Easter, after we sang the hymns – I have to tell you this - after everyone went to sleep, I felt completely*

transformed – I didn't feel ill anymore, just an overall sense of spiritual elation. The guards saw that I was awake and punished me by confining me to the 'black cell' and leaving me there until the morning – but to me, it was like a task I had to accomplish to cleanse my sins…this was a crucial spiritual moment to me. I felt like I made peace with God. Not soon after I was liberated on 21 July 1956… to my surprise I went to the physician and they said that my lungs had completely cleared out…miraculously, I was healthy' (Daniel, Lines 283-296)

Aresti et al. (2016) posits that one of the stages of building a new identity for former detainees is experiencing a defining moment and that reframing trauma in terms of a life purpose or God's plan can also increase inner strength and resilience. Four of the participants described their defining moment as a spiritual or religious epiphany whilst for the other two it seemed to be part of a process of having closure with the past and re-claiming their life and freedom.

To resist prison regime, all the narrators re-arranged their worlds for survival and mobilized their body, soul and spirit: incarceration became the catalyst for a different *modus vivendi*, where the body was mortified and the spirit was liberated in a relentless collective spiritual and intellectual exercise, whether that was through storytelling, poetry, sharing of knowledge with other inmates or an inward turning.

4.4.3. Major theme: Setting History Straight

This overarching theme illustrates the narrators' attempts to clarify and unveil the historical distortions that contributed to the existing Communist nostalgia as a canonical narrative, together with the utterly devastating effects on their relational world and every day existence in the aftermath of their release. Family members of the ex-Gulag prisoners were also hidden victims, facing a host of challenges and difficulties such as psychological strains, discrimination, economic hardship and suspension or expulsions from educational establishments to name a few.

4.4.3.1. *Subordinate Theme: The Long Arm of the Gulag (The Destructive Effects of Political Incarceration)*

This category included the themes depicting the destructive effects of the experiences of torture

and captivity and illustrates the pervasive nature of the traumatic experiences that the participants endured together with their physical, psychological and psychosocial consequences of individuals, families and communities as a whole.

The real repercussions of the Gulag seemed to have been more difficult to spot out before the moment of liberation (most of them as a result of the 1964 decree) when the amnestied prisoners were re-immersed into society and attempted to readjust to everyday life. All of the participants identified post release stressors such as frequent check-ins with the Communist authorities, fear of re-arrest, unexpected ideological discussions with 'informers' aimed at incriminating them , lack of financial and social support, unemployment and social stigma.

Ianis described the sequelae and devastation caused by his political imprisonment on his family and the psychological warfare that followed their carceral years:

'*In 1977 they suddenly turned up at my house and started bringing up stuff about our previous political organisation... I could quickly tell that one of them was an informer, so I made up an excuse that my mother needed me for an urgent matter; when I went back in I told them that one of my cousins passed on and I had to go to Mihai Viteazu – they handed me a piece of paper saying that I had to go to the Securitate headquarters. Once I got there, they started scolding me that I didn't check in with them after I received this visit... There was a Major called Predeanu, who said to me: „Why is it that you don't want to help us?". And I remember I completely lost it with him: ,Who do you want me to help, Colonel? My sister was imprisoned for ten years, my uncle died in prison, my other uncle died in prison, I lost my daughter, my wife is unwell... and so on... who can I help and how? He kept interrogating me for two hours and in the end, he told me: 'Alright, from today onwards nobody is going to disturb you again? But of course they did... they kept on pestering me... sending me written warnings... I am still cautious about who I talk to, to this day. In 1996 I was told by a colonel from the Securitate that he could have arrested me on the spot. I allegedly hadn't declared that I had a visitor from UNO... I couldn't believe my ears! But they continued chasing me, they had 17 informers on my case... how could I feel free? I couldn't trust anyone.*' (Ianis, Lines 496-512)*

In the excerpt above Ianis emphasized the diabolical methods of the Communist apparatus and the prisoners' acculturation to a climate of terror aimed to entirely shatter their previous interpersonal, collective, and familial networks and keep them in a permanent state of terror. Despite being relentlessly harassed and forced to confess to imaginary crimes, Ianis constructed a determined fearless self when providing his aggressors with a reality testing account of his

unbearable pain and its ramifications within the family. The sequelae of this prolonged exposure to the ruthless surveillance system of the Communist Party and the constant harassment by its informers was described as permanent state of suspicion and an embedded lack of trust in others, having an utterly devastating effect on his relational world. In contrast to the previous excerpts where collective identity was more dominant, there was a stronger individual identity emerging here – where there was a repeated use of 'I' and relational references to his close-knit family in his story. This implicitly conveyed that the narrator's actions derived primarily from his relational investments and the motivation to protect and enhance his significant others.

Similarly, for David the stigma of political detention had significant implications on his life post incarceration as he drew attention to the revolving doors of the Gulag camp system and the high level of coercion and control that the Party exercised in the lives of the prisoners after being awarded amnesty. For him, just like for the other participants in this study, being 'released' simply meant being transferred within the Securitate system of detention from the Gulag camps to a fixed settlement - being under the scrutiny of the same ruthless machine of institutionalised terror.

'*After 4 years of prison they released me... I went back to school and finished college, I started university... but they didn't let me finish my studies. At the end of my third year of studies they arrested me again, on the grounds that I had hidden information about another subversive organisation... they interrogated me for another month at the Securitate Headquarters in Calea Rahovei nr.11, and then they let me go. I was also expelled from university. As you can imagine, the year 1960 marked a moment of utter desperation in my life; I had lost my job, I was sick, inept, walking with crutches, I had no money and the woman I loved had left me for another man... that was another terrible life experience – I had met a girl, the daughter of a priest who had died in prison himself, and we were planning to get married…I thought that we had shared values and belonged to the same 'unhealthy' social class – we shared similar political experiences of oppression. However, after a while she gave up on me and went off with someone else… she got cold feet and left me… she thought I could have given her in or just did it out of self-preservation. She broke my heart… she didn't even return the engagement ring I had given her… she never looked back. It was really tough… in '61 I got a job and yet again they threatened to fire me if I didn't become 'their man'… they got annoyed at me that I wasn't cooperating and kept harassing me for years.' (David, Lines 300-316)*

In terms of narrative structure, David's tone becomes thoughtful and more sober as he recounts the impact of the Gulag experience on his life and the severe adverse effects he had to overcome on a social, professional and personal level. There was a sense of aloneness and mistrust that permeated this section of his narrative. However, this was integrated within a wider story of survivorship, the rhetorical function being that of emphasising the extreme adversities that he had to overcome and giving testimony for the strength and resiliency that was needed to withstand and overcome these.

One can see from the excerpt above that the identities constructed by David for himself are complemented by the identities that he constructs of his co-participants and audience. David positions himself as a man of principles and incorruptible values both in relation to the woman who left him and his aggressors. The individual self is more prominent here than the collective one, and there is a movement from history to (his) story and a differentiation from others' experiences within the social context. This reclaiming and voicing of the personal is likely to have stemmed from David's need attempt to achieve self-definition in terms of his unique traits and characteristics in comparison to the woman who betrayed him. The rhetorical function of this seemed to be that of protecting and enhancing himself psychologically whist implicitly disapproving of his partner's betrayal.

The individual self is also of primary salience in George's description of his post incarceration experience. Unlike the other participants, he explicitly exposes the fragmentation and the neuro-psychological effects of extreme trauma on the integration of the self from a linguistic and mnemonic perspective:

'*The configuration of my soul, my psyche were completely changed after imprisonment – it seems so dramatic and absurd that despite being archived as a 'judicial error' in 1969, 10 years after my initial arrest – I received no form of compensation, no apologies. I had to contend with their surveillance and the stigma of having been a prisoner… as a result of all these traumatic experiences I lost my verbal coherence, I cannot organize my concepts and sentences properly, not to mention my memory… everything is shattered... I don't feel free, I couldn't tell you why that is but I am not at ease with myself at all…' (George, Lines 512-519)*

George referred to his trauma, collateral depressive symptoms and his permeating sense of fear throughout the interview, describing the utter sense of ontological alienation that resulted not only from his primary and vicarious traumatic experiences in the camp, but also from the lack

of validation and holding that derived from the resistance to investigate and condemn the communist crimes after the 1989 Revolution. He drew attention to the absence of a mnemo-political narrative to help facilitate his processing and integration of the traumatic past, placing this between the push and pull of socio-political forces. The cognitive and mnemonic shattering that he described seemed to be a direct reflection of the division between two main paradigms regarding the relationship with the troubled past: one guided by the absence of the issue on the political agenda and one that gave historical importance in both the political and judicial sphere. Thus, George's pervasive sense of mistrust and alteration to his soul configuration doesn't come as a surprise. As I witnessed his struggles to coherently articulate his experiences, I found myself wondering how things might have been different for him and the other co-researchers if they had been provided with a safe space to tell their stories.

It is noteworthy that a long period after the 1989 Revolution there had been a certain resistance towards the investigation of the traumatic memory of communist crimes and very few attempts at officially condemning the communist regime as criminal through political acts until December 2006. The political corruption and the institutional perpetuation of old communist structures made it difficult to impose a hegemonic anti-communist discourse and deal with the injustices of the past. The following subtheme will expand more on the experiences of the narrators after the 1989 collapse of the Communist regime and the lack of public recognition and political rehabilitation, with former detainees having to live in a country where former Communist Party leaders still held power, perpetuated crimes and lied about the past.

4.4.3.2. *Subordinate Theme: The Dark Pervasive Legacy of Totalitarianism*

The Dark Pervasive Legacy of Totalitarianism is a subtheme through which the narrators points out to the continuation of Communist mentality and the existence of a current micro-dictatorship, attempting to throw light on the reasons behind the nostalgia for past Communist times and the collective amnesia that characterizes the vast majority of Romanians.

All of the participants repudiated 'Communist nostalgia' and positioned this within the realm of political rhetoric and ideology, rather than the personal/cultural. The rhetorical significance of this theme is best understood if read alongside and in contrast to the fact that the 1989 Revolution was symbolically portrayed as the 'death of Communism', generating a rhetoric of transformation and a hope to transition to democracy.

When asked to reflect on his experience of freedom in the post-Communist Era, Ianis vehemently states:

'*… the mentality is still there. There is a lot of nostalgia out there, you know…*

I would be very interested to know a bit more about this nostalgia that you are referring to.

You know what's happening? The ones who didn't suffer are stuck with that memory that they had secure jobs and housing – nobody really knew what was happening at the time as it was not allowed to broadcast or publish things…nowadays it's no too dissimilar, they have this tacit understanding to keep things like the archives hidden from the masses – it's still a micro-dictatorship' (Ianis, Lines 20-27)

Ianis emphasizes the presence of a reminiscent mentality that left deep imprints of the mental horizon of society as a whole as a result of the long exposure to State indoctrination and communist propaganda. This is rhetorically framed as continuity between past and present and something that is perpetuated by and positioned with the out-group (the 'they', the 'nostalgic' people or 'the ones who didn't suffer'). The rhetorical function here is to compare and contrast the mnemonic apathy and stasis of the out-group to the painful experiences of the in-group.

Similarly, Christian also constructs a self that is situated outside of the canonical narrative of the outgroup, pointing out to the ideologically charged nostalgia of the 'They' and rejecting it as a valid emotion in the context of mass manipulation and control:

'*There are two categories of people that still yearn for the Communist Era: the nostalgia-stricken ones who consciously took advantage of the system in one way or another…on the other hand, there were the indoctrinated, brainwashed and manipulated people – who allowed themselves to be lied to… they might have lacked a certain education, which made them more prone to this kind of influencing… not to mention that the Communist apparatus had a very advanced arsenal of manipulation strategies." (Christian, Lines 680-685)*

Although re-visiting the topographical sites and the secret archives was viewed as quintessential to any examination of the recent past, accessing their files or place of incarceration had been a slow and bumpy patch for all of the narrators, interfering with their ability to process and integrates their traumatic memories accordingly for some. The following excerpt from Luca reflects this:

'*In 1990 I went to the Ministry of Internal Affairs with Ticu Dumitrescu, a senator... in the*

basement there were two levels, but even then, they would only allow us to go on level one – level two was forbidden access and they said to us there were highly confidential documents in there – this was after the Revolution.... I got really upset and broke down in tears' (Luca, Lines 160-164)

Whist it was thought that the opening of the files would be instrumental in providing the sufferers with a sense of closure and validation and a certain sanitization of Romanian politics due to the clues included in the archives as to previous collaborators of the Regime, the delays in ensuring access, the restrictions imposed and the alterations or destructions of official documents made David conclude that the oppressive apparatus of the Securitate and the communist regime continued to operate after the official fall of the dictatorship in 1989:

'*Just after the Revolution in '89 I had a feeling of freedom which soon faded away… I soon realized that it was the same structure which has morphed into something else…. I asked for the disclosure of my Securitate files and they denied me access – I was aware of who my informers had been…anyways, in 2016 on 21 October they eventually replied and provided me with one of my informers names… he had turned 96 that year… they intentionally left it so late. They promised that the investigations were going to continue… what utter nonsense' (David, Lines 247-253)*

Just like with Ianis, there was a sense of mistrust and disappointment that permeated David's narrative in relation to the current political scene in Romania and their commitment to repudiate previous totalitarian structures and provide the thousands of innocent victims with transparency and a potential sense of closure.

In George's case, despite the unveiling of judicial evidence instrumental in obtaining forms of material redress for his prolonged persecution, there was no acknowledgement or pecuniary compensation offered:

'*It all seems so dramatic and absurd that despite being archived as a 'judicial error' in 1969, 10 years after my initial arrest – I received no form of compensation, no apologies… I had to contend with their surveillance and the stigma of having been a prisoner… as a result of all these traumatic experiences I lost my verbal coherence, I cannot organize my concepts and sentences properly, not to mention my memory… everything is shattered... I don't feel free, I couldn't tell you why that is but I am not at ease with myself at all…' (George, 515-520)*

George links his permanent state of unhomeliness and internalized fear of being under surveillance to the failure of the judicial system to provide him with a safe space and acknowledge the drama and the absurdity of his carceral experience. Woodhouse et al (2018) posit that social validation and support play a fundamental role in the reduction of post-traumatic cognitions and core trauma symptoms.

What emerged clearly from these accounts was the failures in purging communism from key power structures and collective mentalities, as well as the participants' disillusionment that the end of Communism was yet to happen, despite the tortures they had endured in the labour camps of the Romanian Gulag. In the words of Ianis:

'*One of my biggest sorrows is that we fought for a cause that hasn't been accomplished… we wanted it for the people of this nation, for their freedom… and I watch TV and see that they are stealing millions from the country and the whole system is based on the 'bribe'… and I change the channel to sports and try not to think about it, but it really hurts…' (Ianis, Lines 583-587)*

The reference to the social custom of giving and receiving bribes point out to the generalized corruption of state institutions, as the main vehicles through which the bad habits of the communist regime are perpetuated. The rhetorical function of the text here seems to be that or raising awareness of the re-enactment of past destructive behaviours that are unwittingly being replicated *ad infinitum* within the entire socio-economical system. Olick and Robbins (1998) referred to this phenomenon as an 'inertial mnemonic persistence'.

Luca attributes the nostalgia and unawareness of the masses to the failure of the power structures to publicly condemn the Communist crimes:

'*They didn't know or rather didn't want to educate the people on what really took place before '89. Some say, 'Look at the blocks of flats that Ceausescu built, democracy gave us nothing … it disheartens me. Someone needed to unpack all this for the masses and wake them up. I felt rejuvenated when the Revolution came… I couldn't go into the crowds due the heart condition I was left with after my prison time. The same Securitate acolytes got in power… there were some good people that could have organized the country differently and got us on the right track*." (*Luca, Lines 548-559*)

He contrasts his rejuvenated state of being after the revolution to the disappointment felt when

being at the receiving end of Communist nostalgia. The same disillusioned tone is present in the excerpt below, where David draws attention to the dangers of extremism and the softer versions of totalitarianism as they emerged under the conditions of an 'imposed democracy', an oxymoronic expression employed to underline the oppressive forces behind the current political structures:

'I have always loathed political extremes, whether right or left…social class hatred or racial hatred, oppressing people just because they are black or Jewish …what an idiocy! To me, liberty and equality are antinomies …if we are totally free, we cannot be equal, if we are entirely equal than we cannot be free…we need to keep a balance. If we want to change oppression, we need to move towards the liberty pole, but it cannot be an imposed democracy…you need to let it oscillate naturally…until the Revolution there was the kingdom of the Party, nowadays we live in the kingdom of Consumerism and money…if you are rich, you have everything…. the country is led by MPs that cannot even speak properly…' (David, Lines 328-335)

4.4.3.3. *Subordinate Theme: Re-Claiming One's Life*

The sense of reclaiming was very strong and amply expressed by all participants. Despite their psychological and somatic sequelae following their incarceration, the continuous surveillance by the Party due to their 'bad biography' and the ongoing stressors of another arrest, they storied themselves as resilient beings that persevered and thrived in their lives. The common denominator across all the narratives is that they were able to recognize and embrace new opportunities, forge stronger relationships with loved ones or with other co-sufferers, or change and evolve on a spiritual level. Having survived the tremendous hardships of the Gulag seems to have provided them with inner strength and made them gain a deeper appreciation for life. Luca's account epitomized the commitment to one's values and perseverance, despite the obstacles encountered on a personal, professional and societal level:

'I came out in '57 and worked as a mechanic in Bailesti in the local industry… I kept on making requests to re-enrol and continue my Law studies, but an academic acquaintance of mine told me to give up and try something else, but not Social Sciences'… he was right, they rejected me countless times… in the end, I applied for a degree in Geography-Geology and they said yes… but my heart was not in it. I kept on chasing my dreams, I asked if there was any chance of getting back into Law and they said I had to start it all over and pass an exam. I was determined, studied hard and in '63 I got a place. I was over the

moon. In '75 I started my career as a lawyer, I worked my way up to the Supreme Court, and in '90 I proudly became the first Ombudsman in Romania." (Luca, Lines 395-407)

The same tenacity and agentive stance is present in Daniel's account, who – despite his incredible academic achievements in the field of Chemistry pre-imprisonment, found his family was deprived of property overnight, denied the possibility to earn a living, and thrown to the margins of society and forced to earn a living by working as an unskilled labourer.

'I started a new degree and managed to obtain as an unskilled electrician… but I was determined to finish university… all I did was work and study; they made it hard for me as I needed work for my placements and they often refused to give it to me as a former detainee; but all my resources were channelled towards this goal, to become an engineer. And I accomplished it.' (Daniel, Lines 364-368)

All of the participants have described themselves as driven by a stronger solidarity with their former inmates and impetus to carve out for themselves a distinctive social, civic, and political collective identity. They unanimously expressed a strong sense of affiliation and meaning as they continued to be actively involved in cultural, academic or social events, particularly taking part in memorials for the victims at many former communist penitentiaries or giving speeches or contributing to the events held at the main *lieu de mémoire* that bore witness to the communist crimes. Christian emphasized the healing experience of sharing the collective experience of pain with others and delegating the responsibility of remembering and reconstructing the past to a stable and coherent *topos* of memory that opens an interactive dialogic space between past and present.

'What really helps is that we managed to turn the old Sighet prison into a lieu de memoire, which is unique in Europe, even amongst former socialist countries. Every year we take part in summer schools, symposia... there isn't many of us left, we are under 3000 former detainees in the whole country... but it is incredibly healing.' (Christian, Lines 869-872)

Echoing Christian, Ianis asked rhetorical question highlighted the same healing quality of being with others and commemorating the Communist past: *'Do you know when I feel truly at ease and free? When I meet with former political detainees for a drink or we take part in certain events.'*

Despite his disillusionment with the current status quo of the country Ianis was proud of assuming an active role in shaping the collective representation of the Communist past by

exposing its hidden facets, including speaking publicly to the media and writing articles. As evident from the excerpt below, he continued to fight for his cause knowing full well that he was at great risk of being picked up and tortured again or possibly murdered for his actions. His beliefs, strong spirituality, and family support strengthened his resolve and supported him in his healing process. Ianis's narrative constructed a coherent self that managed to tap into deep reservoirs of strengths and constantly re-directed himself towards what is meaningful. His narrative account is underpinned by rhetoric of sharing values with the present generation to safeguard the future, articulates in the topos of 'history as teacher'.

'*My strong values and political beliefs cost me 21 years of carceral ordeals…however, after they released me the first time, they sent me to a fixed address. I have always had a strong artistic streak; I loved music, poetry, philosophy… so I decided to start up a choir, which actually got us into the national finals. I became a conductor; I got many prizes. I then started an Armenian dance assembly; I became a playwright… I had a fantastic ascension; I met my wife… and then they arrested me again. I had told her that a second arrest was probable but she told me 'If it happens, I will find a way to bear it… and she did*' (Ianis, Lines 361-370).

For George, the area of growth that sprang directly from his direct and vicarious trauma was manifested on a creative level. After learning French from a well-known writer and prison inmate, his release in 1963 he finished a degree in Philology from the University of Bucharest and became a professor, starting to write his prison memoirs. He also finished his degree in Journalism and became a chief editor of a notorious publication. In his attempt to integrate the traumatic past into his present and make sense of the seemingly incomprehensible, George encountered moments of disintegration, which he described as follows:

'*Last year I started writing a book about the suffering of women in the Communist prison –I spent a long time researching the topic – I once saw them in Jilava prison, a Dantesque imagery that is still haunting me, all dress in white night gowns and led by a fat gipsy guard –anyways this very process threw me into a deep depression and I couldn't continue… but I will go back to it and with God's help I'll publish it one day*' (George, Lines 411-416)

Despite the psychological tension, fear and depression that engulfed him, George constructed a self that bravely embraced his suffering head on, together with the inevitable paradoxes of life. According to Kaufman (2020) 'psychologically seismic' restructuring following traumatic

events is necessary for growth to occur. George's tone was optimistic as he projected himself into the future and committed himself to meaning making.

In spite of the inhumane carceral experiences and the brutal attacks on their sense of personhood, social bonds and values, all the participants seemed to have integrated and transcended the acute sense of ontological vulnerability and isolation through a continuous process of meaning making which was firmly rooted in intentionality and action, during and after incarceration.

During their detention period, they kept themselves existentially awake by following the compass of their core values, providing support and comfort to each other, keeping their loved ones close to their hearts and having faith in an ulterior reunion. After being released, they focused on rebuilding their relational world, cultivating gratitude and acceptance, striving to better themselves academically and achieve professional recognition, as well as taking principled stands to fight political oppression.

4.5.   Destabilizing the Narrative

This stage of analysis is described by Langdrige (2007) as the direct engagement in a political critique of the text, requiring the researcher to engage with critical social theories. Given that 'we can never have a view from nowhere' (Ricoeur, 1981) a phenomenological position that operates outside an ideological position is deemed as 'arguably naïve' by Langdridge (2004.b)

Ricoeur's hermeneutic of suspicion represents his attempt to retain both the objectivity of the text and to remain open to what the text may have to say independent of its author. At the level of analysis, this entails a willingness to listen but also to suspect - that is to become critically aware of how our own biases and constructs might be projected onto the text (stage 1), but also to 'listen in openness to symbol and to narrative and thereby to allow creative events to occur "in front of' the text, and to have their effect on us' (Thiselton, 1992).

In attempting to seek the meaning in front of the text by subjecting the narrative to this stage of analysis, I found it challenging to select an 'appropriate' critical hermeneutics as it posed a significant ethical dilemma; I became aware of the rather cynical clash between an interpretive lens rooted in Marxist theory and my fundamental research aim to give voice to an oppressed group whose suffering was indirectly the result of Marxist-Leninist ideology. Subsequently, whist I can acknowledge the value that this stage can have in moving in the hermeneutical

circle, I am also aware that this needs to be balanced by a hermeneutic that recognises that the participants' stories represents a valid expression of their intent. As a result, I have reflected a lot about different ways in which this ethical dilemma could be resolved and explored this extensively in research supervision, as well as my personal diary.

In trying to achieve the fine balance of 'opening up future possibilities for the narrative' without pushing the narrators 'out of the way', I concluded that using class theory was inadequate for the task, since the resulting hermeneutical conditions seemed unconducive to implementing this analytical stage. Instead, I opted for Habermas's (1981) theory of communicative action as a critical lens for this stage of analysis. His critical theory is aimed at restoring a critical form of reason through the analysis of potentials for human rationality in the medium of language. For Habermas, this can not only engender reflection and inquiry in the realms of self- expression and objective questions, but also the intersubjective world of social norms and values.

According to Habermas' theory of Communicative Action, mutual deliberation and argumentation are inherently essential aspects of resolving societal issues. Habermas situates communicative action in human beings' capacity for rationality, which he grounds within language, more precisely in the form of argumentation. In his view, the crisis which permeates in the modern society is rooted in the manipulation and instrumentalization of individuals by their communities, which are failing to meet people's needs. Marxist ideology needed to be modified to fit the needs of the society, since the Marxist school of thought eliminated the human factor in favour of the analysis of the organization. Habermas posits that this approach has led to a depriving people of their freedom to voice their opinion and argue over issues that are of essence to them. In his theory of communicative action, Habermas provides a theoretical template which is based on social coordination and public participation, reaching consensus by interacting with one another instead of using power over people, thus taking away the benefits of experts and elites.

Intriguingly, what has been noticed at a societal level in post-communist Romania was the presence of a divided public sphere, unable to come to a consensus about the memory of the communist past – the perplexing coexistence of favourable public perceptions of the Communist Era, often labelled as 'communist nostalgia' (Todorova and Gille, 2010) alongside the elite discourse underlining the need for a collective moral appraisal of the social memory of the communist past. The ambivalence and division of the public sphere, as well as the lack of agreement through communicative rationality, where all social actors participate and 'mutually convince one another of what is just and unjust by the force of the better argument'

(Habermas, 1995, p. 124) has led some researcher to hypothesise the presence of a 'trauma of memory' (Tileagă, 2012; Georgescu, 2016; Glowacka-Grajper, 2018).

Within the context of a divided public opinion between the elite's and the popular discourse, 'coming to terms with the past' has become an issue of social debate, one that is in search of an answer: Why is it that some individuals long for 'what was' and manifest nostalgia for such a dark file in history? How is it that people can dissociate from the oppressive legacy of the communist regime (Tileagă, 2012)?

Provided that the Romanian Communist past has become a battleground between the elite's narrative of Communism as cultural trauma and the popular narrative of Communism as a better alternative to the current society, I was particularly interested in the interplay between the personal narratives of the participants and the frameworks of dominant narratives, particularly in the extent to which the canonical narrative was resisted by the personal narratives of the participants.

The narrators unanimously expressed a need to 'account without rest' in order to ensure that the past doesn't repeat itself and that present generations are aware of the ongoing abuses, right violations and injustices which took place between 1945 and 1989 so that a coherent representation of the communist past can be reached. The story of Communism and the Gulag haunts the collective memory of its people and demands deep reflection on the painful lesson to be learned, the articulation of the topos of *historia magistra vitae* or 'history as a teacher' (Forchtner, 2014) . Telling the truth about the past and revealing it publicly was depicted as pivotal, moral ought to stifle any returns of the oppressive communist ideology into collective consciousness, a catalyst for changing the public perception of the communist era and enlightening present generations.

The resistance towards the investigation of the traumatic memory of communist crimes and the lack of official attempts to condemn the communist regime as criminal through political acts until December 2006 was depicted by the participants as an unmistakable sign of political corruption and the institutional perpetuation of old communist structures in the participants' narratives, who described communist nostalgia as 'ignorant' 'mindboggling' and 'bewildering', a word heavily invested with political and ideological connotations and marking a clear cut dichotomy between 'us' (the ones who suffered) and 'they' (the nomenclature, the 'spineless', the ones who benefited). The political and moral tension between 'us' and them' point out to

the existence of a 'reality' of communism which is grounded in lived experience and alterative narrative and standpoints, different from the official hegemonic discourse.

Despite the official condemnation of communism as a 'criminal' and 'illegitimate' political ideology by the Tismăneanu Report (2006) and the official endeavours to master and 'come to terms' with the past, there has been an inherent tension present in the constitution of a unique representation of the past and reaching a common mind in representing recent history as a unified non-controversial social memory. Whilst it is incontestable that the provision of objective historical knowledge of political ideologies and regimes needs to be sought in order to rectify political fabrications, half-truths or mere ignorance, there is also a risk that he creation of an official, normative narrative of communism as 'barbaric' can limit any counter-accounts or alternative positions, without taking into account the subjective dimensions of interpretation alongside the history of past persecution within the framework of transitional justice (Tileaga, 2012).

From a Habermasian standpoint, one needs to try and make sense of the social memory of the Communist Era and the process of 'coming to terms with past' in the often contradictory, ambiguous standpoints and meanings that individuals subscribe to, debate or communicate, engaging with the *dialogue* between objective truth and alternative perspectives, whether they are individual or official remembrances. There is no such thing as one ultimate story of communism and no natural endpoint to making sense of the recent past. A community of memory around the representation of the recent history cannot be built and rendered meaningful unless it springs from a 'shared memory' that can 'integrate' and 'calibrate' (Margalit, 2002) a multitude of perspectives. Positive engagement with social change is unlikely to ensue unless we are willing to listen to and analyse 'the everyday stories people tell' (Manning, 2014, p.177).

Without questioning in any way the narrative truth and validity of the participants' suffering, the 'canonization' of single *representation* of recent history can inadvertently lead to the active suppression of alternative meanings, experiences and interpretations, failing to take into account the argumentative character of social life and to see communism as a socially constituted 'lived' phenomenon, not only a political ideology. A normative account of the recent history on a political, ethical and societal level also implies a normative conception of the 'they', the 'nostalgics' as ignorant, immoral and brainwashed –a stance which alerts us to 'the danger of the single story' and proves problematic for the constitution of a 'community of agreement' in which other subjective dimensions of interpretation are given voice and old vocabularies of oppression are refuted.

In the following section of my research I turn to a thorough evaluation and discussion of the research findings presented so far, which will be followed by an exploration of the contribution to knowledge that this study has to offer and suggestions for future research.

5.   *Discussion*

5.1.   Overview

I would like to begin this chapter by reiterating the rationale behind my research project, whose primary aim was to grasp a better understanding of how the participants understood their freedom through first-hand reflections, as well as generate knowledge of the resources that individuals draw upon in order to sustain or persevere in their search for personal freedom and become resilient in the face of overwhelmingly distressing life circumstances such as political detention and torture.

The final chapter of my study will be directed at reviewing and summarizing the research findings presented in the previous chapter and discuss these within the context of the existing body of relevant literature; their clinical relevance and significance for counselling psychology theory and practice in particular will be considered. I will then review and discuss the methodological challenges encountered and how they were navigated. I will then engage with a critical evaluation of the current project, looking at its limitations and suggestions for future research. The final section will be dedicated to reflections and conclusions.

5.2.   Summary of Findings, Relationship to Existing Literature and Their Implications

The three major themes which were revealed by the interviews were: *'Taking stock'*; *'A painful journey through the carceral world'*; and *'Setting history straight'*. As outlined above, I will now turn to a detailed discussion of these within the context of the existing literature in the field and in relation to their implications for counselling psychology.

Endorsing a contextual constructionist epistemology enabled me to recognize that the participants' narratives and the knowledge produced in the investigative encounter could not be separated from the linguistic, historical and cultural contexts that they inhabited. Rather, these needed to be understood as a product of interdependence and exchange of those factors (Gergen, 1989).

Whilst I have addressed them under separate subheadings, these three thematic spheres are all

interconnected; therefore each section below should be understood by taking into account the wider context. For instance, '*setting history straight*' cannot be evaluated entirely separately from the act of *'taking stock'* against the totalitarian machine and the political oppressive context that led to the participants' incarceration. Similarly, the *'painful journey through the carceral world'* and their *'coping with adversity'* cannot be fully understood without taking into consideration the values and beliefs that motivated the participants to face up to the injustices of the Communist Regime in the first place. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that the presentation of the sections under the major themes format in Chapter 3 was done with an awareness of their interdependence. Also, evocative of the hermeneutic circle that forms the methodological basis of this project, in order to understand the whole one needs to understand its constituent parts and vice versa.

In discussing their attitude towards the oppressive totalitarian apparatus of the Regime before their incarceration, the narrators' position can be characterized as a predominantly agentive one; their actions were guided by the compass of their own values and beliefs, which facilitated a positive appraisal of adversity and enabled the participants to construct their Gulag experiences as meaningful both during and after their incarceration, and courageously confront the totalitarian machine.

Findings from the current thesis support Arendt's (1958) theory of political action which provides useful insights into the conceptualization of freedom under totalitarianism. The participants described their freedom in close relation to taking action, understood as the active engagement and an exercise of effective political agency – not so much as an abstract quality or trait. Similarly, Arendt delineates between doing (*praxis*) and making (*poiesis*), linking the former to freedom and plurality, opposed to an instrumental and tactical approach to politics. To exercise one's freedom is to spontaneously enact the uniquely human capacity for natality - for doing something new - in order to contribute and enrich world that they share with others a stance which is reflective of Arendt's formulation of politics as participatory democracy.

This conceptualisation of freedom also echoes Isaiah Berlin's concept of positive liberty ('freedom to') presented in Chapter One, since it is conterminous with the act of taking stock of one's life and realizing one's fundamental purposes. All conceptions of negative liberty, including Berlin's one as non-interference, are constructed in terms of the absence of that which renders someone unfree. On the contrary, positive liberty is built on the presence of something that renders one free – which emerged as *'taking stock' in* the participants' accounts.

In the face of oppression imposed through indoctrination, violence, and deceit, the participants in this study stuck to their beliefs and cultivated them autonomously, despite their external limitations. In all of the narrators' accounts there was a clear thread of how the noble concept of 'positive freedom' had been distorted and twisted by the brutal Communist Regime, subjugating individual self-realization to the collective interests of the Party through coercion, manipulation and torture.

The dangers of authoritarianism that come with the application of 'positive freedom' have been highlighted by both of the post war anti-totalitarian philosophers mentioned above. For Berlin, this can lead to an excuse for tyranny and despotism, in which governments or individuals have the power to exercise lasting control over people's actions. Whist recognizing that positive liberty doesn't lead to tyranny when conceived properly; he advocates a negatively free society, where individuals are free from un-freedom, conceptualized as external interference. Interestingly, what emerged from the accounts of the participants was that that there is no simple dichotomy between positive and negative liberty and that being hunted down as the enemies of the 'working class' and deprived of their liberties ('freedom from') might have rendered them unable to do certain things, but no unfree to stick to their values, beliefs and desires with integrity and dignity.

By contrast to Berlin, Arendt's political freedom is positively articulated as the presence of something that renders one free, which for her is political action, understood as direct, performative participation in the public sphere. Her action is therefore viewed as a form of Being-With, as human togetherness - in which free individuals remain inherently plural and varied viewpoints are acknowledged as valid.

Findings from the current thesis endorse Arendt's philosophical ideas that exercising political freedom and taking action are closely linked to the spontaneous actualization of natality, the human capacity to do something new and contribute to the common world they share with other people. The participants unanimously reported that taking action against the despotic measures of the Regime was strongly related to the need to do something to bring about a change into the world, a world that would have developed differently had they not acted in line with their values and beliefs. Their freedom coincided with their taking stock and taking action, providing a sense of purpose, engendering resilience, hope and psychological well-being.

The findings captured in the narratives also echo Merleau-Ponty's (1945) understanding of freedom as an in-between place, a dialogical encounter between the individual and the world.

Reality can shape us but our orientation towards the world can also shape reality, since we evaluate the external world in terms of their influence on us. As shown in Chapter 2, for Merleau-Ponty our freedom is gained only from the way in which we act. We are thrown into a world which is populated with objects, languages, customs, opportunities, and limitations, and we are ontologically dependent on situations that are already articulated for us. Our free engagement with the world is contingent on this prior 'field' of meanings in which we find ourselves. It follows that, through their actions, the narrators showed and created their meaning - as well as that of others and the world - articulating their freedom on both an ontological and political dimension, remaining existentially alert to their choices in order to honour the compass of their values and preserve their authenticity.

Drawing from Sora's (2004) political philosophy, the implications of these findings are for practitioners to be more aware of the powerful link between the ontological and the political, and whether there is a dialogical relationship between the individual and the public realm; appreciating their wider socio-historical contexts and assessing whether the inner dialogue of the person is generalized at a societal level and contained within the public realm. Freedom and ontological salvation can only be achieved when we manage to actualize our meaning and we remain true to ourselves, not silenced by societal conventions and norms. For Sora, it is ultimately the task of the 'inner dialogue' to keep us awake in our existential choices and render us free.

The articulation of a dialogical relational freedom in which the context dictates the general framework of human action is mirrored by the accounts of all narrators, who invariably begin their interviews by setting the oppressive political scene, describing how their personal agency was limited against that backdrop.

Another important aspect that emerged from the narrators' accounts with regards to talking stock and standing up for their values in spite of the repressive and brutal machinery of the Communist apparatus was the strong sense of ownership, authenticity and freedom that derived from it. These findings are reflective of the existential stance of Jaspers (1919), who posits that by openly facing up to limit-situations and coming to terms with them, human beings can uphold their integrity and attain their existential freedom, transcending what is transitory into the broader context that contains Existence. For participant Daniel, for instance, the physical turmoil of being put in isolation for three days in the 'black coffin' dissipated entirely when he thought about the meaning of his resistance and experienced a sense of congruence with a bigger Self which he referred to as 'total freedom', a sacred place of elation that his torturers

had no access to. For Jaspers, confrontation with one's limits also constitutes an initial mode of transcending in world-orientation, a contact with the freedom of *Existenz*, which Jaspers calls 'the open horizon' or 'the transcendent'.

This facet of freedom that the participants refer to is aligned to what Rollo May called 'essential freedom' or 'freedom of being', which points out to the context within which the need to act emerges. For May, this is the fount out of which 'freedom of doing' is born, representing a deeper level of one's attitudes.

In narrating their pre-trial and detention years, whilst they were rendered powerless to change the actions of the Regime and had virtually no 'freedom of doing', all the participants elaborated on their sense of 'ultimate freedom' as the capacity to choose their attitude toward their captors and torturers. It was this 'freedom of being' which was crystalized for the participants as *'taking stock'*, the ability to reflect, to ponder, out of which their actions subsequently emerged.

All the narrators unanimously identified themselves as 'free' during their detention, articulating their freedom ontologically, as an essential state of their Being. Their narratives of detention resonate conceptually with the manifestation of an *'autonomous frame of mind'* which I discussed in Chapter Two. Ehlers, Maercker and Boss (2000) defined this construct as the ability to be authentic, to retain one's humanity and hold on to one's will, values and convictions under extreme circumstances such those of political detention and torture. In their clinical study on former political prisoners of East Germany they proposed the construct of *'mental defeat'* as the main predictor in the development of post-traumatic stress in former political prisoners of East Germany, defining this as a perceived sense of loss of all psychological autonomy, a total absence of self-awareness and self-recognition as a human being with a will their own.

In this sense, freedom appears not only basic to being human, but to the very being of existence. In the words of Heidegger (1927), to be free is to be one's self. Human beings are ontologically free to choose authentic living or self-deception. Heidegger's articulation of ontic freedom as a 'choice to choose oneself' and May's 'freedom of being' account for how detention, torture and the daily confrontation with crisis and trauma enhanced the narrators' consciousness of freedom, rather than diminishing it. An example of this was found in participant David's account:

'I was one year in and had three years more to serve – my main thoughts were that even a hen can live for seven years feeding on grains from the neighbours, I was bound to

make it through this experience. So I tried to keep my head clear and look forward to the future... They could take away my liberty, but not my freedom'. (David, Lines 158-162)

In the above extract, the participant makes a clear distinction between political 'liberty' and inner 'freedom' – inferring that anyone could potentially survive the Communist Gulag, hate it as they may. However, freedom is essentially an inner state. In the words of participant Ianis: '*They were never going to convert me to communism… they could starve me, torture me – but not get to that inner core where I kept my beliefs and ideal, which were unbreakable.'*

The secret 'core' that gave Ianis and the other participants their sense of identity and autonomy is conceptually conterminous with 'freedom of being' (May, 1981), evoking a deeper and more extensive source of strength rooted in the noetic sphere of values, meaning and spirituality. Although liberty as 'freedom of doing' may be a prerequisite of freedom, it does not lead automatically to the latter. The freedom that the narrators encapsulated in their accounts transcended the idea of liberation as absence of restraint, which at most can render one 'free from oppression' but not essentially free. Whilst liberty is negatively defined as the exemption of abuse of power, the freedom described in the accounts above is more likely to be holistic, connoting a total state of being, something integral to one's humanity.

Whist acknowledging the fundamental role that the institutions of democracy and the market society play in protecting civil liberties, these ideas imply that they are not enough to generate the cultural and spiritual reserves that people need in order to feel free. By turning inwardly and reconnecting with what was meaningful to them, the participants were able to overcome the cruel and demoralizing conditions of detention and find comfort in an introspective, reflective life – a 'silent escape' (Constante, 1995). By writing stories and poems in their minds, memorizing and communicating with those in the cells around them using the 'language of the walls' or cultivating their spirituality, they escaped the grey routine of prison life and tapped into a reservoir of meaning and freedom.

This echoes Solzhenitsyn (1973) concept of freedom in his *Gulag Archipelago*, where he describes the inhumane conditions in the Soviet labour camps and what it means *not* to be free. For him, the only way to achieve freedom is to overcome the spiritual malaise of the modern era and to re-discover the transcendent core in our Being. He equates the absence of freedom with the absence of an introspective, reflective life. In his view, the West's lack of spiritual fulfilment is so entrenched and the numinous is so gravely absent from people's lives, that it's no surprise at all that people are struggling with Being more than ever before. For the Russian philosopher, the spiritual crisis in the West is more profound than the other political, economic,

and environmental crises.

Similarly to Solzhenitsyn, Frankl's idea of freedom is inseparable form a self-transcendental orientation towards values and meaning. We are only free as long as we are congruent with the 'inner voice' within. The implications of this are that any individual can fundamentally decide what shall become of them, mentally and spiritually, even when they are faced up with the most degrading circumstances. By courageously stepping into the struggle and engaging with transitoriness and suffering, one can also develop meaning in their lives and achieve individuation, retaining their dignity and spiritual freedom even when they are in a prison, labour or concentration camp.

There was an overarching sense that the survivors positioned themselves as fundamentally different from the dehumanized prison guards who tortured and degraded them systematically (e.g., '*One cannot expect a beast to show a conscience*'), conceiving their aggressors as guilty against God and their own humanity, thereby displacing the idea of fighting back or seeking revenge. Their faith in a divine intervention that would eventually make things right and the hope and that they would eventually be rehabilitated and the political system will change operated like a buffer against mental defeat.

Findings from this research also, therefore, support Viktor Frankl's philosophical ideas according to which freedom is realized in self-transcendence, meaning that human beings belong to the noetic dimension and can consciously direct themselves towards their values and meaning. His concept of freedom as co-extensive with responsibility is strongly evoked in all of the narrators' accounts as they unanimously describe a strong moral imperative to realize act and realize their meaning and values, in full awareness of the consequences that were to ensue. In Luca's words, '*we had to take action, there was no other way, and it was our duty to defend our family values and broken community*'. This is also in line with Ehlers and al.'s (2000) findings that a strong belief system is likely to facilitate a positive appraisal of crisis and adversity and enable a global orientation to life as comprehensible and meaningful. All the participants in the study made reference to a moral view on what is right and a belief in intrinsic freedom as the main values that enabled them to withstand adversity and survive the tortures and humiliations of the Regime.

 This highlights the importance of noetic dimension of freedom, implying that in order to be free in society one must first be free inwardly by staying true to oneself, living with inner coherence and responsibility and remaining alert to their life choices. It follows that there are

significant differences between 'freedom to' and 'freedom from' and one needs give careful attention to these differences and the language encoding them when working with these pivotal human and political concerns (Pitkin, 1988).

The implications for treatment would be for practitioners to stay curious to how this client group might be articulating their sense of freedom both politically and ontologically; and remain vigilant to the agentic or victimic life plots and tones depicted in their narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995). Agency and perceived decision freedom have been shown to have a reciprocal relationship with resilience, meaning that higher the sense of efficacy, the more adaptive their coping is in the face of challenges (Russell, 2014). According to Meichenbaum (2013) the stories of resilient individuals tend to be redemptive, creating meaning out their painful life experiences and positioning themselves as direct agents of the positive changes that they have been able to bring about, frequently with the support of other people. Resilient narrators seem to be able leave the past where it belongs and integrate the traumatic events into a coherent meaningful narrative, which can often be passed on to future generations as 'lesson learned'.

As I have shown in Chapter 4, overcoming adversity and unremitting tortures of the Gulag was thematically articulated in a four-dimensional force-field (physical, personal, social and spiritual), with a stronger thematic dominance of the transcendent element, as well as connectedness and Being-with others.

I will discuss the subthemes within this category using the four dimensions of existence model (Binswanger, 1964; Van Duren-Smith, 1984; 1988) as a reporting framework and by turning to how the participants dealt with the inexorable existential paradoxes and tensions within and outside the concentrionary universe of the Gulag Archipelago in relation to each of these relational spheres, navigating the fourfold tasks of survival, affiliation, identity and meaning making. Whilst these layers are all interwoven and knotted together, I will discuss them under separate headings for taxonomic purposes.
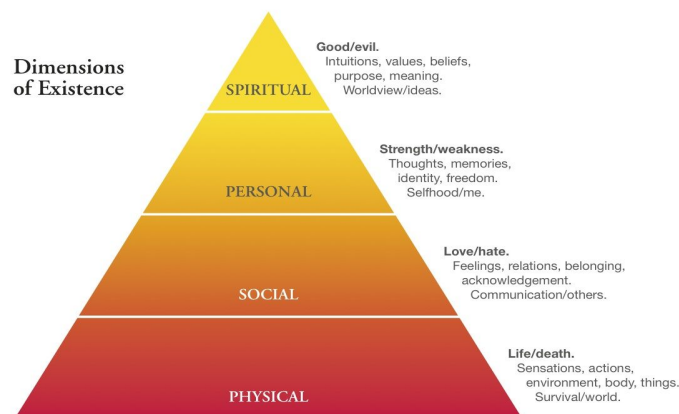
Figure 2. Van Deurzen's (1984) four dimensions of existence

The physical dimension

When describing the pre-trial and punitive detention, all of the narrators offered abundant details of traumatization on the physical dimension: the sleeplessness and visual interdictions during interrogations, the beatings, being exposed to extreme temperatures, forced standing, the hunger, the physical exhaustion and lack of personal hygiene were present in all the accounts. Degrading inhumane conditions included overcrowded cells, lack of air, lack of clothing, humid cells along with rats and insect infestations in the cells. Psychological torture included threats to self and family, forcing to betray or maltreat others, watching executions or physical torture inflicted on others or sharing cells with the corpse of an inmate.

The findings from the present research were consistent with those from Bichescu et al (2005)'s aforementioned study, who indicated an unusual high number of exposure to physical assault reported among former political detainees in Romania. All of the narrators referred to specific memories that involved physical abuse and degradations in the camps in the absence of any prompting questions aimed at eliciting traumatic content, which suggests that these were salient concerns for them. Overall, the narrative accounts were focused on the collective self, the extermination agenda that the Regime had for the labourers and the provision of factual

historical information, which might have constituted a cognitive strategy to avoid connecting wholly with the traumatic memories during the interview (Nelson and Horowitz, 2001). In particular, Ianis's account of the Pitești experiment was marked by non-narratability and a clear diversion from the personal to the factual.

Findings from this study support the fact that previous and current experiences of traumatization are salient themes for this client group and are partially consistent with the findings of Willis et al.'s (2015) systematic review according to which political imprisonment can have long lasting effects on the mental health of former political prisoners. However, dominant concerns that emerged from the participants' accounts and contributed to their distress in the present were clustered around dissatisfaction with the current political climate, the lack of rehabilitation or financial compensation, isolation or lack of social support.

The heterogeneity of responses from the six participants is in line with the aforementioned study and the author's acknowledgement that every individual will have a unique response after exposure to trauma, with some being distressed and some strengthened.

Symptoms which approximated significant distress during and after detention were explicitly expressed by George in terms of re-experiencing and intrusive memories, emotional bluntness and fragmentation, as well as a pervasive sense of fear. He was also the only participants who reported an ongoing battle with bouts of depression and persistent somatic complaints following traumatization to the skull in detention. Christian also alluded to a period of low mood and hopelessness during incarceration, which he attributed to the monotony of the camp labour and meaninglessness.

Luca described his acute psychological turmoil pre-trial as 'nerves' and crying every day, and also reported an enduring sense of 'unease' in open public spaces. It was noteworthy that other participants also used local idiomatic interpretations of distress. For instance, Ianis's allusion to his soul not being 'at peace' after his deportation from Pitești suggests a spiritual conceptualisation of the trauma sequelae, which can be linked to local idiomatic constructions of distress.

On the contrary, Christian experienced a total dissipation of fear as he was able to live more courageously and fully in the aftermath of his Gulag imprisonment. The same experience emerged from Daniel's and Ianis's accounts. Daniel stated that he experienced a strong sense of contentment and peacefulness looking back on his life choices and was able to 'sleep well at night' as a result, knowing that he did what his consciousness dictated. Ianis also referred to

feeling at peace with his past and derived a lot of joy and meaning out of his involvement in ex political prisoner organisations and his regular meetings with former inmates.

David made reference to one 'breakdown' point after his release from prison, when he was unable to work and provide for himself and felt abandoned by his partner at the time, supporting the findings of Halvorsen & Kagee (2010) according to which emotional distress originating from detention trauma can be significantly exacerbated by and financial strains and unemployment. However, David's story telling process seemed to gravitate around the breakthroughs rather than the breakdowns both during and after imprisonment, delivering a redemptive narrative in which he managed to create meaning out of his painful life experiences and reclaim his sense of personal self-efficacy.

David felt that he was in harmony with himself and the world, stating that he his Gulag experiences have led him to have a deep sense of freedom on an emotional and psychological level, which he articulated as purposeful living.

According to Denis et al. (1997), former detainees who pursued a professional career after release exhibited a lot less psychological difficulties and physical health complaints, a finding which was reflected in all the co-researchers' storylines, apart from George's. This could be explained by George's lack of a network of support post release, as well as his current engagement with documenting the sufferings of the women in the communist prisons – which he explicitly identified as a trigger for his psychological deterioration at the time of the interview. Bichescu et al (2005) identified psychological support as a key variable in the persistence of current psychosomatic symptoms. Social context and social support are also important prerequisites for self-disclosure, which was linked to the level of successful integration of past traumatic events to one's life story in a study conducted by Rebassoo (2008). Given that released political prisoners were prohibited from talking about their imprisonment, disclosure about prison camp experiences could only take place in a circle of very close and highly-trusted family members (Applebaum, 2003).

The personal dimension

All of the participants described their painful journeys of self-discovery and personal transformation as a non-linear search for meaning and unity which oscillated between disruption, fragmentation and reconfiguration of their sense of selfhood. As they recounted their life stories before, during and after incarceration, the participants' narratives moved back and

forth on the temporal dimension, covering different territories of existence that were in a constant flow. For Heidegger (1962), the primary dimension of human existence is temporal. Their self-storied accounts provided unifying identities by gathering their past actions and happenings into coherent and purposeful narratives in which their experiences and actions were understood and made meaningful.

At the level of the personal world the participants made extensive reference to the way in which their strong value system provided them with centeredness, integration and selfhood, enhancing their inner freedom and facilitating a positive appraisal of adversity. The findings in this study are keeping with previous research (Ehlers, 2000) that underlined the role of an 'autonomous frame of mind' as a buffer for trauma within the context of political incarceration. The participants' sense of freedom was strongly linked to how they conceived of themselves, how they arrived and held on to their self-conception as essentially good people, morally adequate and upstanding. By shifting their focus away from thinking about their options and alternatives beyond the walls of the Gulag to their opportunities for moulding their self-image, they broke the chains of repression and discovered ultimate freedom. The idea that true freedom is fundamentally about self-fashioning and acting out of one's self conception is convergent with Heiddegger's *Dasein*'s freedom of authentically choosing oneself over unassumed living and self-deception. In this sense, freedom can only be achieved in so far as we are congruent with the voice within and we calibrate ourselves to our values and belief system, thus being inseparable form a self-transcendental orientation towards meaning, which interweaves the personal with the spiritual sphere.

The social dimension

The role of social networking and being-with-others during and in the aftermath of their carceral experiences has received little attention in political prisoner studies (Davidson, 1991; Kahana et al., 1986). It was immediately apparent across all narrative accounts that inter-relatedness, being-with-others (Heidegger, 1962) was a central element of their coping and something that was pivotal to their survival in the Gulag. All the participants jointly conveyed a sense of collective communion in suffering and achieved meaning on this level through striving with others for the preservation of their values. With the rare exception when starving inmates had the chance to share their scarce food rations, it was their relational nexus and the interpersonal support which gave them the strength and courage to persevere. This strong sense of interconnection with others and openness emerged against a background of increased

vulnerability and confrontation with the limits of existence by the prisoners, which seemed to have illuminated the value of Being more and provided a collective sense of purpose in the Gulag.

All six participants revealed that they had experienced a wide range of supportive human relationships during their detention. Some of them found a protective figure amongst the prison inmates, like in the case of Christian's affinity with Olino Bartesi or Daniel's bond with Father Sârbu, reminiscent of the father-son relationship. All the accounts referred to group or pairing friendships as the most common bonding rapport, with each member contributing and responding to the needs of the other in various ways. All of them described a 'helping hand' experience, recalled and labelled as 'life-saving' and occurring at crucial moments of extreme adversity, such as coming out of the torture room and being offered an inmate's food ratio, being warmed up by the bodies of other prisoners in the winter or being gifted someone's boots when their toes were frostbitten. The mere utterance of a familiar phrase, a song, a reminiscence, a joke, a story were important for maintaining morale and sufficient to reignite humanness and the glimmer of hope, enabling their 'will to live' to resurface and strengthening their spirit.

For many of these survivors, the supportive bonding that they formed in the Gulag and after their liberation continued to accompany them throughout their life cycle. For instance, Ianis stated that he only felt 'truly free' when he meet up for a drink with his old inmates, which is supported by the findings presented in the literature review. For all of the six narrators the memory of the unanimity and reciprocal support in the labour camps continued to be a sustaining and humanizing influence up until the present day. This links back to the previous theme and the observations made by Viktor Frankl (1948), who described that surviving concentration camps depended on whether or not the prisoners had 'something' or a 'somebody' to live for.

In his study on the role of social support in the lives of Holocaust concentration-camp survivors, Davidson (1984) draws attention to the role of social support as an essential protective factor in the prevention and amelioration of the long-lasting effects of traumatization. Viktor Frankl's experience of the death camps provides an added insight into the meaning of 'survival' and endurance in extremity as it intersects the narrative accounts of my participants in its acknowledgment of the transcendence of evil through the victims acting together in a spirit of solidarity and communion.

Cacioppo et al. (2005) have found that sociality, spirituality and meaning-making are essential to human beings and that relational and collective bonds combat feelings of isolation and loneliness and are critical to the healing process. Findings from this study also converge with the conclusions of the aforementioned literature indicating that social support is a key variable in current or lifetime symptoms of trauma (Bichescu et al, 2005; Rebassoo, 2008). Belonging to former political prisoners' organizations is likely to have directly contributed to reduced symptoms in the six participants, encouraging members to share their camp experiences with each other and supporting each other practically and emotionally. Solidarity and close bonds between camp inmates – that often lasted beyond release - had a strong protective role in psychological reactions towards continued persecution in all the participants. What's more, throughout the iterative analysis it emerged that the process of supportive social affiliation transcended its psychosocial function and mediated and consolidated on the participants' spiritual dimension, which was central across all the narrative accounts.

The spiritual dimension

According to Van Deurzen and Arnold-Baker (2005) central to this dimension is what people find or make meaningful, their values and beliefs being the foundations on which their worldview is built. Whist this often includes one's relationship to religion, it is also about how people relate to their ideal world and pursue truth, creating meaning and purpose in their lives. Many prisoners with spiritual beliefs tried to sustain patterns of meaning that transcended the immediacy of the dire predicament they were faced with. Whether they attended improvised liturgies, engaged in prayer or studied the Bible, engaging in spiritual practices allowed them to adhere to a fundamental order and structure their everyday lives around it, which acted as strong barrier against psychological fragmentation and meaninglessness. Being with others who shared similar beliefs and values allowed them to re-create a symbolic world in which they experienced life more coherently, providing them with a sense of ontological rootedness, which made the pain, misery and humiliations of their carceral experiences more bearable. Their narratives reflected an acute ontological longing to be grounded in a self-transcending power source, giving their survival journey a different meaning, which seemed to have enhanced their psychological resilience and endurance under very extreme conditions.

The participants' accounts reflected those of Viktor Frankl (1905-97), who observed during his detention in the Nazi prison camps that the inmates who had a well-structured symbolic world were more likely to get through camp experiences than those who lacked meaning orientation.

Nietzsche's quote 'He who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*' (in Frankl, 1984: 97) is convergent with what the participant unanimously expressed in their accounts, who pointed out that having values and models that were deeply internalized made them derive mental toughness and endurance and contributed to them resisting the alien system which denied those very values.

During the interviews and throughout the iterative analysis, a recurring subtheme that was clearly delineated and salient in all the participants' narratives was that of finding meaning in suffering, which emerged from all the analysed transcripts. They all conveyed a sense of courage and acceptance before, during and after their imprisonment. When asked what helped them cope with the deprivation, degradation and traumas to which they were subjected, the salient message I heard was that they made a choice, a conscious decision as to how to respond to the pain that was inflicted on them. The connection between inner freedom and suffering, or how one choses to respond to suffering, appeared as a red thread throughout all the participants' stories.

All of them unanimously stated that they managed to retain a degree of psycho-spiritual autonomy and felt free and empowered as a result, despite the horrific circumstances of the carceral world. In the words of Rollo May: '*Freedom is not determinism. Freedom is the individual's capacity to know that he is the determined one, to pause between stimulus and response and thus to throw his weight, however slight it may be, on the side of one particular response among several possible ones*' (1963, p.103).

Indeed, all the interviewees described instances in which they derived strength from courageously owning that space between the stimulus (the extreme duress that they were under) and their response to it. Their attitude encapsulates Paul Tillich's definition of courage as '*the universal self-affirmation of one's Being in the presence of the threat of non-Being*' (Tillich, 1952, p. 163).

This idea was also echoed in Solzhenitsyn testimony of incarceration in the Russian work camps, who stated that in the absence of all freedom of doing, he felt himself pushed back to the level of essential freedom. This was also true for the participants of this study, whose sense of freedom of being became stronger as everything in their existential world became unfree. The carceral universe of the Gulag threw into stark contrast previously unnoticed or unappreciated aspects of the prisoners' daily existence, reorienting them towards their meaning and changing the plot of their life narrative towards a more purposeful and significant one.

The strong emphasis on the noetic dimension of freedom unanimously reflected in all the participants' accounts aligns with the philosophical ideas of Frankl and Jaspers, as well as those of the Eastern European school of thought. For Eliade, Sheshtov, Solzhenitsyn or Steinhardt, freedom has deep metaphysical connotations and is realized in self-transcendence, through a conscious orientation towards one's values and meaning and alignment with the 'voice within'.

The implications for the practice of counselling psychology could be that therapists need to be sensitive to issues related to faith and religious behaviour when conceptualizing the impact of imprisonment on the symbolic world of individuals with spiritual backgrounds. Marcus and Rosenberg (1988) define a symbolic world as a total system of beliefs, values, morals, and knowledge, which impose themselves upon everyday life in their capacity to inspire or to give meaning to individual or collective activity, providing a framework of ultimate meaning. This echoes Karl Jaspers philosophical ideas presented in the first Chapter, according to whom thinking oneself free is coterminous with projecting oneself into the broader context that contains existence, which he calls 'the open horizon' or 'the transcendent'. What happens when this sense of ontological security is challenged radically or breaks down? What happens when belief in God, hitherto felt as central to one's wellbeing, is undermined or destroyed?

The vacuum of meaning (Frankl, 1955) is more prevalent than ever in today's society; mental health problems have reached unprecedented levels in the last 20 years, particularly amongst teenagers; when tackling an epidemic, one need to think beyond treatment and symptom management. Is this mass neurosis symptomatic of a contemporary world that is missing something vital to the fabric of human existence itself? Is this disturbance generated and maintained by a society that became alienated from the essential principles of life? And if so, what is the answer? (Barnett, 2019)

In an increasingly alienated secular age, when the therapeutic encounter is reigned by time-limited interventions and clinical protocols and services guided by economical gains, the spiritual dimension of clients' lives can be easily forgotten or cut out from the conceptualization of concerns. It is not surprising, therefore, that the transcendent experiences of the former prisoners of the Romanian Gulag, both during and after incarceration, have been overlooked by the existing research, despite the strong presence of the spiritual theme in political prisoners' diaries, survivor testimonies and memorialist literature.

Marcus and Rosenberg (1988) posited that one of the reasons why camp survivors have been so difficult to treat is that the models being used to understand and conceptualize their problems have not adequately considered the significance of the prisoners' loss of their symbolic world. Formulating the former prisoner's symptoms in theoretical clinical terms exclusively does not sufficiently capture the core of the survivor's experience nor does it illuminate the significance of their suffering for their overall functioning and life project.

An existential approach might incorporate an exploration of the ways in which trauma and crisis are impacting on the client's experience of freedom by mapping them onto the four existential dimensions and constructing a conceptual framework that both enables and ensures a holistic multi-layered analysis of the lived experience, which is one of the values of CoP. For example, an exploration of the *Eigenwelt* (the personal world) would be pivotal to understanding how they related to themselves and whether they embraced authentic living or closed off to freedom to keep anxiety at bay. Equally so, in the social dimension (*Mitwelt*), one could explore how they related to others and to what extend this sense of communion facilitated resilience and post-traumatic growth. The way in which they managed the oppressive physical space of the carceral world, the ailments, injuries and scars they were left with in the aftermath of torture would be subsumed under *Umwelt* (the physical world); last but not least, the values they adhered to and the sense of meaning that helped them rise above adversity would be found in the spiritual realm of the *Uberwelt*.

Mindful of CoP's encouragement of approaches that focus on value-related goals and acknowledge situatedness and relatedness of the individual by exploring the wider context of relationships, community involvement, spiritual life and the broader geo-political and societal background, , existential therapy holds much potential for this client group - moving away from conceptualizing the self as an independent thing or object to a more relational, process-based perspective of self-as-context (Bunting and Hayes, 2007).

On the issue of political freedom, the participants unanimously reported dissatisfaction with the current political climate and alluded to the government's failure to purge Communism from key power structures and collective mentalities, which was seen as largely contributing to the maintenance of a canonical narrative of Communist nostalgia. Being denied access to the files compiled by the Securitate agents, together with the Government's failing to publicly identify the political informers who persecuted and haunted them for decades had been a salient factor of disappointment and perpetual distress, perceived as lack of validation for their sufferings and of closure with the past. There was a general consensus amongst the narrators' accounts that

transitional justice in post-communist Romania had been obstructed since the original Secret Police archives were complemented, adjusted or completely wiped out after 1989, making it impossible to distinguish victims from victimizers and to identify the high-ranking perpetrators of the Regime that secured key positions in cabinets and legislatures after the 1989 Revolution. The long exposure to State indoctrination, mass manipulation and control was seen by the narrators as deeply imprinted in the mental horizon of the current society and articulated as lack of freedom, a collective entrapment in an enduring reminiscent totalitarian mentality and mnemonic apathy.

The findings in this study are keeping with previous research that underlined the salience of current contextual political and economic concerns for former political prisoners and the growing sense of disenchantment with course of Romanian society and its government. The widespread corruption, the wooden language of the politicians and the nostalgia or mnemonic indifference of the mass population were depicted as manifestations of a dissociated polity, unable to integrate its past and learn its lessons. Lack of validation or perceived negative responses from others following traumatic experiences have been linked with poor mental health outcomes (Woodhouse et al, 2018; Davis, Brickman, & Baker, 1991; Dunmore et al., 1999, 2001; Ulman, 1996). Kagee (2004) pointed out to the fact that feelings of abandonment and the feeling that the government has forgotten about their sacrifices were more prevalent concerns amongst former political prisoners of post-apartheid South Africa than clinical presentations; and emphasized the need to dislodge the idea that psychopathological symptoms are the primary concern for survivors of human rights violations and advocating a different framework for approaching this client group's concerns.

An existential phenomenological approach that focuses on the geo-political context and the multi-faceted articulation of freedom in the story telling process is likely to capture the complexity of this client group's experience and may open up other avenues for clinical practice. The general implications of this for the CoP profession could be that practitioners would become more aware of the complexities surrounding issues of political violence and oppression and attend to political, social, and economic forces in the formulation of their clients' lived experience of distress, tailoring their interventions to different concerns and sociocultural contexts.

In Chapter 2 I referred to the objective of CoP '*to develop phenomenological models of practice and enquiry with a firm value base'* alongside those of traditional scientific psychology,   an aim which has proved difficult to meet in the context of an increased demand for evidence

based practice and manualised treatments and led to a crisis within the profession (Cooper, 2011; Deurzen, 2010; Woolfe, 2012).

The very characteristics that define the field of CoP (its pluralistic nature, the acknowledgement of the uniqueness of individual experiences, its commitment to social justice and its sensitivity to the geo-political contexts and relational matrices that clients and therapists co-inhabit) have not been reflected in the treatment options offered to this client group and are more imperative than ever in a world enthralled by the scientific and technological advances and wedded to the manualised application of evidence based protocols. This research has shown that developing social justice competencies to be especially attuned to these aims; consequently, integrating these ideas into clinical practice and treatment plans will continue to help support CoP's fundamental principles at a time when this is being so undermined.

The voices of marginalized and oppressed individuals or groups are a just as valid frame of reference as that of mental health professionals (Kagee, 2004). Protecting and enhancing this pluralism should be an ethical imperative for all practitioners within the CoP field, since this is precisely what ensures that clients are given a voice and feeling empowered to choose *their* route to wellbeing, and the interventions are informed by the explicit needs of the clients, rather than those which professionals assume to be of salience. Intervention programs offered to former political prisoners in Romania may profit from widening the ontological and ideological paradigms in which they are rooted and become more attuned to this client group's specific needs.

As counselling psychologists it is important to develop social justice competencies and gain an understanding of the client's wider geo-political and socio-cultural context, which is likely to be informing a collaborative conceptualization of their difficulties, their meaning-making, as well as their engagement with the therapeutic process.

Embedded attitudes and mistrust in the capacity of another to hold their stories are likely to impact on this client's group ability to open up and engage with therapeutic services and intervention programs. As I discussed in chapter 1, one of the Communist Regime's strategies to discourage individuals to assert themselves politically or culturally was the use or arbitrary psychiatric diagnoses, followed by sectioning and cruel medical experimentations aimed at breaking their minds. As such, practitioners need to take into accounts the nefarious associations that this client group might have with the medical model and the field of psychopathology. Also, counselling services were inexistent before, during or after the

participants' arrest (Psychology was banned as a field of study/profession during Communism), resulting in a generalised lack of socialisation and access to any form of psychological therapy before 1989. What's more, given that the criminal nature of the communist genocide wasn't officially named until 2006, this client cohort was offered no psychological support or official public recognition, which often exacerbated their sense of aloneness and fragmentation, as seen in George's narrative. This is consistent with Bichescu and al.'s (2005) research, whose findings supported then need for public recognition and political rehabilitation as a necessary component of this client group's recovery journey.

Another compounding factor which needs to be taken into consideration is the fragile relationship between this client group and mental health professionals in the aftermath of the 1989 revolution, exacerbated by strong cultural antagonistic undertones towards 'traitors', as well as by a prevailing sense of mistrust amongst citizens of ex-communist countries. Naveh (2004) advanced the idea that prolonged exposure to a culture of terror and the intense indoctrination of the entire population had led to a dangerously close enmeshing between mental workers and former political prisoners in the aftermath of the Romanian revolution and the fall of the communist regime. The circulation of cultural hyper-codes, such as 'rehabilitation' and 're-education' proved highly detrimental to the validation and cultural integration of the former political prisoners, leading to the generalization of a culture of violence. This together with the slow criminalization of the Communist past and the ever-depleted resources of interpersonal trust has resulted in a lack of relevant, appropriate and effective therapeutic intervention programs for this client population.

In a country like Romania, the public realm of inter-social relation was destroyed by suspicion and distrust between citizens, making a meeting point between the individual and the community difficult and undermining the possibility of a dialogic relationship between these two spheres. According to the dialogic existentialists, freedom emerges from the dynamism of the ontological and the political, whereby individuals are able to manifest their inner freedom and build an authentic political community in which this can be expressed.

The participants' narratives unanimously reflected on the push and pull of socio-political forces in shaping and constructing the social memory of the Communist past for collective consumption, alluding to a constant fight for mnemonic hegemony in the public sphere, where they felt like the out-group, on the other side of the canonical narrative of Communist nostalgia.

5.3.   Methodological Challenges

Throughout the research process the main methodological challenges I encountered were working with the elderly, my dual roles as researcher and practitioner, and establishing validity in cross English, qualitative narrative research. The following section will elaborate on my attempts to navigate these through engaging in reflexivity, attending research seminars and using supervision.

One of the first challenges I anticipated in this study was related to the age of the participants (80+). Whilst I considered myself   privileged to bear witness and listen to people's suffering and sense of loss; I was aware that this could have also been emotionally taxing. Higgins (1998) discussed her research experience with elderly people and how painfully difficult it can be for the researcher to interview individuals who are frail, dependent and lonely. In order to deal with the resultant feelings in healthy ways, I often turned to my personal therapy and research supervisor to make sure that I coped with the emotional impact of my research. I also used a research journal to identify and process my own emotions about my interactions with the study participants and their stories they shared.

Another methodological concern for this qualitative cross-English research had to do with the process of translating; the challenges of language differences arose from the fact that both my participants and I as the main researcher have the same non-English native language and the non-English data generated by this research will eventually lead to an English publication. Given that the interpretation of meaning is at the core of qualitative research and that translation is an interpretative act, there was a danger of diluting the participants' experiences and losing some of their meaning through language. The relation between subjective experience and language is a two-way process. Language is used to express meaning, but the other way round, language influences how meaning is constructed. Thus, one could argue that translating the interviews might lead to a threat to the validity of the study, since I needed to translate my findings or include participants' quotations and put it into words that are not their own.

Qualitative research is considered valid when the distance between the meanings as experienced by the participants and the meanings as interpreted in the findings is as close as possible (Polkinghorne, 2007). Having worked as a professional translator from Romanian to English and vice versa, I believe that I was able to capture the richness in meaning and understand culturally bound or metaphorical expressions originating from the data in the source language.

When I encountered difficulties in the process of interpretation I consulted with another professional translator and/or used an online multi-national research group, which I found very helpful.

During the pilot stage of the research I translated the transcript into English and asked a professional interpreter to translate this back into Romanian. Comparing the two versions led to increased reflexivity and verification and prompted me to consult with other non-English researchers who published their qualitative research in English outlets in order to collect data and explore how they handled language differences in their studies. This allowed me to gain more insight into this issue and become more aware of the potential threat to validity when meaning gets lost in translation.

Another challenge came from within the field of narrative research and the possible concerns regarding narrative validity. Riessman (2008) posits that fixed criteria for validity developed for experiential research might not be applicable to narrative studies and proposes a focus on 'narrative truth' instead. She highlights that the validity of a study should be assessed from within the paradigms that spawn them.

Given that this project was rooted in a contextual constructionist epistemology, its aim was to elicit personal narratives revealing the context-bound subjective truths of my participants and my own interpretation of their accounts. In order to increase the study's trustworthiness, as Polkinghorne (2007) suggested, I tried to ground my interpretations in the very narrative data that generated them by using extensive verbatim quotes from the transcripts, in order to contextualize and provide better support for these.

5.3.1.   Giving Voice

As explained in the methodology chapter, the current study ensured the anonymity of the six participants in line with BPS ethical guidelines. However, when discussing this issue with my interviewees they all expressed disappointment in the fact that they wouldn't' be able to 'own' their stories if their identities are hidden.

Parker (2005) argues against the ethical value of anonymizing participants, stating that this could lead to denying the very voice in the research that might originally have been claimed as the main aim. This can also collude with the idea that the target group is frail, vulnerable and in need of protection (McLaughlin, 2003), which could be seen as disempowering. Parker

(2005) posits that way in which participants are portrayed can also constitute an ethical stance, arguing for a mutual exploration of whether the participants would prefer to be named and to share their story openly.

Another aspect of my research that I had to carefully navigate was the 'critical' stage of my analysis, in which the texts were, subjected it to a hermeneutic of suspicion grounded in social theory. In trying to identify the most appropriate critical theory to engage with, I realized that the use of Marxist class analysis ran the risk or going against everything that my participants' stories and experiences stood for. As a result, when engaging with imaginative hermeneutics I had to be mindful of not destabilizing the narrative at the cost of silencing the voices of my participants, by making sure that the perspectival shift brought is not colluding with the very aim of my study – which is why I opted for Habermas's (1984) critical theory as an interpretative lens for this stage of research.

Having discussed the methodological challenges and evaluated the findings within the context of the existing literature and in terms of their implications for clinical practice and contribution to knowledge, in the following and final chapter I will go on to present an overall evaluation and conclusion of this research project.

5.4.   Limitations of This Study and Ideas for Future Research

The aim of the current research project was to further understand the multi-faceted experience of freedom as it was experienced by the six participants of this study, as well as to explore their positioning and the meanings attributed to their Gulag experience through the narratives they constructed. A broad approach was taken in the exploration of the phenomenon of freedom, in order to avoid the elicitation on any demand characteristics of the research context (trauma, post-traumatic stress, oppression etc.) and inadvertently endorsing a pathologizing stance. Bjorkund et al. (2000) suggest that research questions have the potential to sensitize respondents to the nature of a clinical category that is being assessed (i.e. PTSD), which can result in their endorsement of the symptoms by virtue of what they perceive to be expected, rather than their phenomenological experience. Whilst the semi-structured interview was explicitly focused on broader issue of freedom, my main aim was to conduct a non-directive investigation of particular aspects of a wider phenomenon, rather than trying to organize their discourse to fit the demand characteristics of the research context or other prevailing

expectations. To this end, I believe that my questions were appropriately open and conducive to a participant led exploration of the topic of freedom.

The use of CNA allowed for a multi-layered approach to the data, which integrated phenomenology, narrative inquiry and the engagement with critical social theory through the inclusion of a hermeneutic of suspicion.

Given that my study was an idiographic rather than a nomothetic one, my intention was to give voice to the experiences of freedom of a small group of participants and discover the subjective meaning and uniqueness in their stories, rather than to produce generalizable conclusions or develop theories attributable to a wider population. As I stated earlier, one of my aims has been to provide further insight into the lived experiences of this client group and open up alternative perspectives, in the hope that my findings could lead to other possible avenues for inquiry.

At the outset of this project I made reference to the scarcity of research on former political prisoners from an existential-phenomenological perspective. Most studies have come from the field of clinical psychology and have largely focused on the long-term effect of incarceration, with a focus on PTSD. Whist I am not contesting the usefulness of this, I am of the view that the narrow focus on clinical data sets, questionnaires and check-lists runs the risk of obviating a perspective of wider and more complex concerns, which might have been more fittingly addressed through the use of more integrative and systemic interventions. The use of a mixed method design could have the added benefit of giving a voice to research participants and ensure that study findings are rooted in their experiences, as well as reveal potential inconsistencies between quantitative results and qualitative findings, which could prove to be a particularly worthwhile and timely contribution in investigating the experiences of this client group.

In line with a unifying 'freedom paradigm' (Hanna, 2011) for the conceptual integration and alignment of the counselling profession, it could be interesting to expand on the current research in order to generate a psychological theory of freedom by building on the subjective experiences of former political prisoners obtained as result of this research study. As I suggested in Chapter 3, the findings from my study could potentially lead to Constructive Grounded Theory research.

A limitation of the present study was the recruitment method, since all of the participants were selected through former political prisoner support organizations. However, the absence of an institutional frame would have not made possible the recruitment of a sufficient number of participants due to the strong pervasive sense of mistrust and suspiciousness when asked to

report their experiences within survivors of the Gulag (Neculau, 1999). Further research in this area would benefit from matched control groups, seeing how the experiences of former political prisoners who belong to such an organization and those who are not part of any at all might compare; as such, their detention experiences might differ significantly.

Future research could also benefit from a more heterogenous sample that allows for further consideration of the individual differences with regards to the participants' gender. Since the current research was limited to the lived experiences of men, future studies which integrate those of formerly imprisoned women could shed further light on gender differences between cultural and generational narratives of femininity and how these might be articulated through the participants' lived experiences of political detention.

Given that conditions and effects of political imprisonment can vary between countries and historical eras, further research on survivors of political persecution in the former Communist Countries of Eastern Europe may add helpful data in understanding their experience of freedom and how this might have changed over time, as well as an exploration of their coping with adversity within a specific geo-political and socio-cultural context.

The above points are some tentative ideas for those interested in this area and are just beginning to be explored. I welcome any suggestions, improvements or criticisms.

Having discussed and evaluated the findings within the context of the existing literature as well as in terms of implications for clinical practice and contribution to knowledge, in the following and final chapter I offer an overall evaluation and conclusion of this project.

5.5.   Conclusions

As stated at the beginning of this research project, the focus on the lived experience of freedom as it was experienced before, during and after political detention in the Romanian Gulag was an attempt to broaden the paradigm of psychopathology which has been largely framed in terms of the 'western trauma discourse' (Summerfield, 1999). The intention of this study was not to deny the fact that symptoms of traumatization may occur, but to place these symptoms in context by calling attention to the variety of other salient issues that former political detainees have been confronted with, which may or may not constitute appropriate targets of psychological intervention. By exploring the lived experience of freedom from an existential-

phenomenological perspective, the participants were free to choose how to identify themselves in their stories.

An alternative framework for interpreting their 'problems in living' (Van Deurzen, 1984) may thus be more broadly defined to include social, political, and economic factors as they impact on the individuals' psychological state and sense of well-being. Such a broader paradigm within which to conceptualize the present concerns of this client group is likely to capture the complexity of their experiences and may have important implications for the development of interventions.

As an existential practitioner and counselling psychology trainee, I think that it is imperative to take into account the pluralistic nature and commitment to social justice of the CoP profession, its acknowledgement of the uniqueness of individual experiences and its sensitivity to historical, socio-political contexts and relational matrix in which clients and therapists co-exist. These characteristics don't seem to have been fully reflected in research literature or treatment options offered to this client group. Interventions focused solely on the amelioration of post-traumatic stress disorder symptomatology and what mental health professionals presume to be salient for them may have less utility than those based on the actual expressed needs of this client group. The current research was a first step in illuminating the ways in which former political prisoners understood their freedom in the context of confrontation with trauma and crisis, and how their experience has changed over time.

When I embarked upon this journey, I didn't anticipate how personally transformative this would be. Being at the receiving end of my participants' stories and hearing their harrowing accounts about their infernal plight in the Gulag, *a tormentum ad infinitum,* has undeniably been a challenging process. Nonetheless, it has been enriching far beyond my expectations: it has taught me that human beings are capable of incredible fortitude and that confrontation with adversity and suffering have the potential to become an catalyst for growth and a source of strength and meaning, expanding one's sense of freedom rather than diminishing it. In the words of Paul Tillich *'once we overcome the No in our surrounding conditions, we reach a Yes that is livelier than ever before'* (1952, p. 180). My research revealed that freedom has a significant inner dimension and is realized in self-transcendence through a conscious orientation towards one's values and alignment with one's purpose; one way of dealing with the challenges of today's world is to turn inwardly and remain vigilant to one's personal existential choices. There is no freedom unless the inner experience finds an external expression

in the world, since to be free and to act are identical (Arendt, 2006). The articulation of our inner freedom can be a pivotal component in building an authentic political community, in which there is a dialogical relationship between free individuals and society and where freedom emerges from the dynamism of the intersubjective space between them.

5.6. References

Aldarondo, E. (2007). Rekindling the reformist spirit in the mental health professions. In E. Aldarondo. (Ed.). *Advancing Social Justice through Clinical Practice.* (pp. 3-17). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. Publishers.

American Psychiatric Association (2013). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Fifth ed.). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing.

Andrews, M., Squire, C. and Tamboukou, M. (Eds) (2013) *Doing narrative research*. Second Edition London: Sage Publications.

Andrews, M. (2007). Exploring cross-cultural boundaries. In D. J. Clandin (Ed.) *Handbook of narrative inquiry*, 489–511. Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage

Andrews, B., Brewin, C. R., Philpott, R., & Stewart, L. (2007). Delayed-onset posttraumatic stress disorder: A systematic review of the evidence. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 164(9), 1319–1326.

Applebaum, A. (2003). *Gulag: A history*. New York: Doubleday. Chicago

Aresti, A., Darke, S. and Manlow, D. (2016). 'Bridging the Gap': Giving Public Voice to Prisoners through Research Activism. *The Prison Journal*. 224, pp. **3**-13.

Archer et al. (2016).   What Is Critical Realism? American Sociology Association, [online] http://www.asatheory.org/current-newsletter-online/what-is-critical-realism

Arendt, H (1946) *What is Existenz Philosophy*" Parisian Review,13:1, p.47

Arendt, H. (1951). *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt.

Arendt, H. (1958). *The Human Condition.* The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London

Arendt, H. (2006). *Between past and future*. Tenth Edition. New York: Penguin Books.

Arrendondo, P. & Perez, P. (2006). Historical perspectives on the multicultural guidelines and contemporary applications. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 37(1), 1-5.

Arredondo, P., Tovar-Blank, Z., & Parham, T. (2008). Challenges and promises of becoming a culturally competent counselor in a socio-political era of change and empowerment. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 86*(3), 261–268.

Ashworth, P. D. (2003). An approach to phenomenological psychology: the contingencies of the lifeworld. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 34 (6): pp.145–156

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (M. Holquist, Ed.; C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Barnett, O. (2019). The Silent Escape: Finding meaning and freedom in the face of totalitarianism and oppression. *Self and Society ,*47 (1), 30-34

Barthes, R. (1975). Introduction to the structural analysis of narrative. *New Literary History*, *6*(2), 237-272. (Original work published 1966.)

Banister, P., Burman, E., Parker, I., Taylor, M., and Tindall, C. (Eds), (1994). *Qualitative Methods in Psychology: A Research Guide*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Basoglu, M., Paker, M., Ozmen, E., Tasdemir, O., Sahin, D., Ceyhanli, A., Incesu, C, & Sarimurat, N. (1996). Appraisal of self, social environment, and state authority as a possible mediator of posttraumatic stress disorder in tortured political activists. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 105, 232-236.

Bauer, M., Priebe, S., Haring, B., & Adamczak, K. (1993). Long-term mental sequelae of political imprisonment in East Germany. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 181(4), 257–26

Berlin, I. (1958). Two concepts of liberty. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Journal

Berlin, I. (2002) : Liberty, Oxford University Press, USA; 2nd edition

Bjorklund, D. F., Cassel, W. S., Bjorklund, B. R., Brown, R. D., Park, C. L., Ernst, K., & Owen, F. A. (2000). Social demand characteristics in children's and adults' eyewitness memory and suggestibility: The effect of different interviewers on free recall and recognition. *Applied Cognitive Psychology,* 14, 421–433.

Bichescu, D., Schauer, M., Saleptsi, E., Neculau, A., Elbert, T., & Neuner, F. (2005). Long-term consequences of traumatic experiences: An assessment of former political detainees in Romania. *Clinical Practice and Epidemiology*, 1(17), 1–11.

Bielsiak, J: Regime Diversity and Electoral Systems in Post-Communism, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 22:4, p. 407–430.

Blaikie, N. (2007). *Approaches to social enquiry: Advancing Knowledge*. 2nd edn. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press

Blair, L. (2009). Psychotherapy and the economic context: Some reflections for practice. *DCoP Newsletter*, 1(1), 7-10.

Blokker, P. (2005). Post-Communist Modernization, Transition Studies, and Diversity in Europe. *European Journal of Social Theory*, *8*(4), 503–525.

Binswanger, L. (1946). The Existential Analysis School of Thought. In R. May et al. (eds) *Existence.* New York: Basic Books.

Boos, A., Ehlers, A., Maercker, A., & Schützwohl, M. (1998). Trauma, Kognitionen und chronische PTB: Eine Untersuchung an ehemaligen politischen Gefangenen der DDR. *Zeitschrift für Klinische Psychologie*, 27(4), 244–253.

Bradley, L., & Lewis, J. (2000). Introduction. In J. Lewis & L. Bradley (Eds.), Advocacy in counseling: Counselors, clients & community (pp. 3-4). Greensboro, NC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services.

Brinkmann, S. and Kvale, S. (2008). Ethics in Qualitative Psychological Research. In C. Willig and W. Stainton-Rogers, *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*. London: Sage pp.263.79.

British Psychological Society (2005). Division of counselling psychology: professional practice guidelines. Leicester: BPS.

British Psychological Society (2019). *Code of Ethics and Conduct*. Available from: http://www.bps.org.uk/the-society/code-of-conduct/code-of-conduct_home.cfm

British Psychological Society (2013). *Ethical principles for conducting research with human participants*.http://www.bps.org.uk/the-society/code-of-conduct/ethical-principles-for-conducting-research-with-human-participants.cfm#principles

Bruner, J. (1986). Models of the Learner. *Educational Horizons, 64*(4), 197-200

Buber, M. (1923). *I and Thou,* trans. W. Kaufman, Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark 1970.

Bunting, K. and Hayes, S. C. (2007). 'Language and Meaning: Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and the EI Model', in K. J. Schneider (ed), *Existential-Integrative Psychotherapy: Guideposts to the core of practice* (pp. 217-234). New York: Routledge

Cacioppo J.T., Hawkley L.C. and Browne M.W. (2005). How can I connect with thee? Let me count the ways. *Psychol Sci.*16(10):798-804

Calhoun, L. G., & Tedeschi, R. G. (2006). The foundations of posttraumatic growth: An expanded framework. In L. G. Calhoun, & R. G. Tedeschi (Eds.), *Handbook of posttraumatic growth: Research & practice*. (pp. 3-23). Mahwah, NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Calhoun, L. G., & Tedeschi, R. G. (1991). Perceiving benefits in traumatic events: Some issues for practicing psychologists. *Journal of Training & Practice in Professional Psychology, 5*(1), 45-52.

Calhoun, L. G., & Tedeschi, R. G. (1998). Beyond recovery from trauma: Implications for clinical practice and research. *Journal of Social Issues, 54*(2), 357-35731.

Camus, A. (1942). *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Harmondsworth: Penguin 1975.

Carter S.M. and Little M. (2007). Justifying Knowledge, Justifying Method, Taking Action: Epistemologies, Methodologies, and Methods in Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Health Research*;17(10):1316-1328.

Constante, L. (1995). *The Silent Escape Three Thousand Days in Romanian Prisons;* trans. By Franklin Philip

Corbett, L. & Milton, M. (2011). Existential therapy: A useful approach to trauma? in *Counselling Psychology Review*, March, .26: 1

Chambless, D.L. (2002). 'Beware the Dodo bird: the dangers of overgeneralization', *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 9 (1): pp.13-6.

Charmaz, K. (2000). Constructivist and objectivist grounded theory. In N. K. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 509–535). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Christensen, L.B. (1997). *Experimental Methodology* (7th edn). London: Allyn & Bacon.

Clarke, H., Rees, A. and Hardy, G.E. (2004). 'The big idea: clients' perspectives of change processes in cognitive therapy', *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, 77 (1): pp.67-89.

Clarkson, P. and Nippoda, Y. (1997). The experienced influence or effect of cultural/racism issues on the practice of counselling psychology – a qualitative study of one multicultural training organization. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 10 (4): pp.415-437.

Clandinin, D.J. and Connelly, F.M. (2000) *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco

Cohn, H. W. (1997). *Existential Thought and Therapeutic Practice: An Introduction to Existential Psychotherapy*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Cohn, H.W. (2002). *Heidegger and the Roots of Existential Therapy*, London: Continuum.

Collins, J., Gibson, A, Parkin, S., Parkinson, R., Shave, D. & Dyer, C. (2012). Counselling in the workplace: How time-limited counselling can effect change in wellbeing. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research: Linking research with practice*, 12(2), pp.84-92.

Connor, K.M. (2006) Assessment of Resilience in the Aftermath of Trauma. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 67, 46-49

Constantine, M.G., Hage, S.M., Kindaichi, M.M. & Bryant, R.M. (2007). Social Justice and Multicultural Issues : Implications for the Practice and Training of Counsellors and Counselling Psychologists. *Journal of Counselling and Development*, 85, 24-29.

Cooper, M. (2003). *Existential Therapies*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Cooper, M. (2004). 'Viagra for the brain: psychotherapy research and the challenge of existential therapeutic practice', *Existential Analysis*, 15 (1): pp.2-14.

Cooper, M. (2008). *Essential Research Findings in Counselling and Psychotherapy. The Facts Are Friendly*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Cooper, M. (2010). The challenge of counselling and psychotherapy research. *Counselling & Psychotherapy Research*. Vol. 10 (3), pp.183-191.

Cooper, M. (2011). Meeting the demand for evidence-based practice. *Therapy Today*, 22 (4), pp.10-16.

Cooper, M. and McLeod, J. (2010). *Pluralistic Counselling Psychology*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Connor K.M. (2006) Assessment of resilience in the aftermath of trauma. *J Clin Psychiatry*. 67 Suppl. 2:46-9

Constantine, M. G., Hage, S. M., Kindaichi, M. M., & Bryant, R. M. (2007). Social justice and multicultural issues. Implications for the practice and training of counselors and counseling psychologists. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 85,* 24-29.

Corrie, S. (2010). What is evidence? In R. Woolfe, S. Strawbridge, B. Douglas & W. Dryden (Eds.), *Handbook of Counselling Psychology* (3rd ed., pp.44-61). London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Crăiuțu, A. (2007). Mihai Sora: A philosopher of dialogue. *East European Politics & Societies, 21*(4), 611-638

Cutts, L.A. (2013). Considering a Social Justice Agenda for Counselling Psychology in the United Kingdom. *Counselling Psychology Review*, 28(2), 8-16.

D'Andrea, M. D. (2006). In liberty and justice for all: A comprehensive approach to ameliorating the complex problem of White racism and White superiority in the United States. In M. G. Constantine & D. W. Sue (Eds.), *Addressing racism: Facilitating cultural competence in mental health and educational settings* (pp. 251-271). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons.

Dahlberg, K., Drew, N. and Nystrom, M. (2001). *Reflective Lifeworld Research.* Lund, Sweden: Studentlitteratur.

Dahlstrom, D. O. (2013). *The Heidegger Dictionary*. London: A & C Black

Darves-Bornoz, J. M., Alonso, J., de Girolamo, G., de Graaf, R., Haro, J. M., & Kovess-Masfety, V. (2008). Main traumatic events in Europe: PTSD in the European study of the epidemiology of mental disorders survey. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 21(5), 455–462.

Davidson, J. R., Hughes, D., Blazer, D. G., & George, L. K. (1991). Post-traumatic stress disorder in the community: An epidemiological study. *Psychological Medicine, 21*(3), 713-721.

Davis, R. C., & Brickman, E., & Baker, T. (1991). Supportive and unsupportive responses of others to rape victims: Effects on concurrent victim adjustment. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 19, 443—451

Davis, D. and Savill, M. (2008). A follow-up study of the long-term effects of counselling in a primary care counselling psychology service. Counselling and Psychotherapy Research: Linking research with practice, Vol. 8(2), pp.80-84.

Denis D, Eslam J., Priebe S. (1997). Psychiatric disorders after political imprisonment in the Soviet occupation zone and in the GDR from 1945–1972. *Fortschr Neurological Psychiatry* **65**(11):524–30.

Denzin, N. K and Lincoln, Y. S (2000). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, *2nd edition*. Thousand Oaks. Sage

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2005). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications Ltd. Abstract

De Shazer, S. (1985). *Keys to Solutions in Brief Therapy*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Deurzen, E. van (2002). *Existential Counselling and Psychotherapy in Practice*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Deurzen, E. van (2010). Foreword to M. Milton (Ed) *Therapy and Beyond: Counselling Psychology Contributions to Therapeutic and Social Issues*. pp.xv-xviii. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Deurzen, E. van (1984). Existential Psychotherapy, in W. Dryden (ed.) *Individual Therapy in Britain*. London: Harper and Row.

Deurzen, E. van (1988). *Existential Counselling in Practice*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Deurzen, E. van & Arnold-Baker, C. (2005). *Existential Perspectives on Human Issues: A Handbook for Therapeutic Practice.* Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Deurzen, E. van and Kenward, R. (2005). *Dictionary of Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling.* London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Deurzen, E. (2015) Structural Existential Analysis (SEA): A Phenomenological Method for Therapeutic Work. *J Contemporary Psychotherapy* **45,** 59–68

Dillon, J. and Wals, A.E.J. (2006) On the dangers of blurring methods, methodologies and ideologies in environmental education research, *Environmental Education Research*, 12(3/4), pp. 549 – 558.

Division of Counselling Psychology (2005). *Professional practice guidelines*. Leicester: British Psychological Society.

Driscoll, R. and Tantam, D. (1998). Anxiety and Anxiety Related Disorders. In Tantam, D. (ed.). *Clinical Topics in Psychotherapy.* London: Gaskell Press.

Dunmore, E., Clark, D. M., & Ehlers, A. (2001). A prospective investigation of the role of cognitive factors in persistent posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after physical or sexual assault. *Behaviour Research and Therapy, 39*(9), 1063-1084.

Dunmore, E., Clark, D. M. & Ehlers, A. (1999). Cognitive factors involved in the onset and maintenance of PTSD. Behaviour Research and Therapy, 37, 809-829.

Ehlers, A., Maercker, A., & Boos, A. (2000). Posttraumatic stress disorder following political imprisonment: The role of mental defeat, alienation, and perceived permanent change. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 109*(1), 45-55.

Ehlers, A., Clark, D. M., Dunmore, E., Jaycox, L., Meadows, E., & Foa, E. B. (1998a). Predicting response to exposure treatment in PTSD: the role of mental defeat and alienation. Journal of Traumatic Stress, 11, 457±471.

Eliade, M. (1978) *History of Religious Ideas*, vol. I, *From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*, translated: W. Trask, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press

Eliade, M. (1982) *A History of Religious Ideas*, vol. II, *From Gautama Buddha to the Triumph of Christianity*, translated: W. Trask, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press

Eliade, M. (1961). *History of Religions, 1*(1). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press

Emerson, P. & Frosh, S. (2004). *Critical Narrative Analysis in Psychology. A Guide to Practice.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Etherington, K. (2004). *Becoming a Reflexive Practitioner. Using Our Selves in Research.* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Finlay, L. (2008a). Introducing phenomenological research. *Unpublished Article. Retrieved from http://www. google. ca/search.*

Finlay, L. (2008b). Through the looking glass: intersubjectivity and hermeneutic reflection. In L. Finlay and B. Gough (Eds.) *Reflexivity: a Practical Guide for Researchers in Health and Social Sciences.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, pp.105-119.

Finlay, L. and Evans, K. (2009). Relational-centred Research for Psychotherapists: Exploring meanings and experience, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Finlay, L. and Gough, B. (Eds.). (2008). *Reflexivity: a Practical Guide for Researchers in Health and Social Sciences.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Forchtner, B. (2014): Rhetorics of judge-penitence: claiming moral superiority through admissions of past wrongdoing, in*: Memory Studies*, 7(4): 409-424

Fouad, N.A., McPherson, R.H., Gerstein, L., Blustein, D.L., Elman, N., Helledy, K.I., & Metz, A.J. (2004). Houston, 2001: Context and Legacy. *The Counselling Psychologist*, 32(1), 15-77.

Fouad, N. A. (2006). Multicultural guidelines: Implementation in an urban counseling psychology program. *Professional Psychology, Research and Practice, 37,* 6-13.

Flowers, P. (2008). Temporal tales: The use of multiple interviews with the same participant. *Qualitative Methods in Psychology Newsletter*, 5, pp.24-27.

Forrester, M.A. (2010). *Doing Qualitative Research in Psychology: A Practical Guide*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Frank, A. W. (2012). Practicing dialogical narrative analysis. In Holstein, J. A., Gubrium, J. F. (Eds.), *Varieties of narrative analysis* (pp. 33 – 52). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Frankl, V. E. (1955) *The Doctor and the Soul*, New York: Knopf.

Frankl, V. E. (1992). *Man's search for meaning: An introduction to logotherapy* (4th ed.) (I. Lasch, Trans.). Beacon Press.

Frankl, V. (2011a [1948]. *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning.* London: Ebury Publishing

Fromm, E. (1941). *Escape from freedom*. Farrar & Rinehart.

Gadamer, H.G. (1989) *Truth and Method*. 2nd Edition, Sheed and Ward, London.

Gadamer, H.G. (1991). 'Gadamer on Gadamer.' In *Gadamer and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hugh Silverman. New York: Routledge Press.

Gee, J. P. (2005). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. New York: Routledge

Georgescu, D. (2016). Between Trauma and Nostalgia. The Intellectual Ethos and Generational Dynamics of Memory in Post-Socialist Romania. *Südosteurop*a, vol. 64, no. 3, pp. 284-306

Gergen, K. (1989*). Warranting voice and the elaboration of the self. Texts of Identity*. Sage Publications.

Giorgi, A. (1985). Sketch of a psychological phenomenological method. In A. Giorgi (ed) *Phenomenology and Psychological Research*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

Giorgi, A. (2010). Phenomenology and the practice of science. *Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis*, 21 (1), 3.-22.

Giorgi, A. and Giorgi, B. (2003). Phenomenology. In J. A. Smith (ed.) *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Glasser, B.G. and Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing Company.

Głowacka-Grajper, M. (2018). Memory in Post-communist Europe: Controversies over Identity, Conflicts, and Nostalgia. *East European Politics and Societies*.;32(4):924-935

Glück, T. M., & Maercker, A. (2012). PTSD in the elderly: An update on prevalence, symptom presentation and clinical implications. *Traumatic Stress Points*, 26(3), 10–12.

Goleman, S. (2012). The Psychology of Worldviews: Jaspers/Heidegger. *Presenting EPIS A Scientific Journal of Applied Phenomenology & Psychoanalysis*; retrieved via http://episjournal.com

Goodman, L. A., Liang, B., Helms, J. E., Latta, R. E., Sparks, E., & Weintraub, S. R. (2004). Training counseling psychologists as social justice agents: Feminist and multicultural principles in action. *The Counseling Psychologist, 32,* 793-837.

Gorman, W. (2001). Refugee survivors of torture: Trauma and treatment. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 32(5), 443-451

Gough, B., Madill, A. (2012). Subjectivity in psychological science: From problem to prospect. *Psychological Methods*, 17(3) 374-384.

Grancea, F. (2006). *Inside the Mechanisms of Romanian Modernization: The Transformation of Public Sphere between Media and Political System*, Booksurge Publishing

Grancea, F. (2010). The concept of Freedom in Post-Communism in *Revista de Sociologie*, 5-6.

Grether, J.K. (1974). Existentialism On the Oppression of Women - What Can We Learn? *Insurgent Sociologist*.;5(1):25-40.

Gough, B and Madill, A (2012) Subjectivity in psychological science: from problem to prospect. *Psychological Methods*, 17 (3). 374 - 384

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Habermas, J. (1984) .*Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. Translated by Thomas A. McCarthy. Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press.

Habermas, J.. (1995). Reconciliation through the Public Use of Reason: Remarks on John Rawls's Political Liberalism, *Journal of Philosophy* 92, 3: 109-131.

Habermas, J. (1987). *Theory of Communicative Action, Volume Two: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Translated by Thomas A. McCarthy. Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press.

Habermas, J. (2006): *The divided West*, Polity Press

Halvorsen, J. O., & Kagee, A. (2010). Predictors of psychological sequelae of torture among south African former political prisoners. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 25(6), 989–1005.

Hanna, F. J. (2011). Freedom: Toward an integration of the counselling profession. *Counsellor Education and Supervision*, 50(6), 362–385

Health and Care Professions Council (2012). Your duties as a registrant: Standards of conduct, performance and ethics. (http://www.hcpc uk.org/assets/documents/10003B6EStandardsofconduct,performanceandethics.pdf) July, 2012.

Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and Time* (J. Macquarrie, & E. Robinson, Trans.). Oxford, UK

Heidegger, M. (2003). *Four Seminars*. Trans. Andrew Mitchell and François Raffoul. Indiana, trans). Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing. (First published 1873).

Heitzman, J., & Rutkowski, K. (1997). Mental disturbance in persons prosecuted for political reasons in Poland in the years 1944–1956. *Polish Psychiatry*, 31(2), 153–164.

Hemsley, C. (2013). An enquiry into how counselling psychology in the UK is constructed as a profession within discipline-oriented publications. *Counselling Psychology Review*, 28(1), 8-23.

Higgins, I. (1998). 'Reflections on conducting qualitative research with elderly people', Qualitative Health Research, 8, 858-66.

Hiles, D., Cermak, I. and Chrz, V. (2009) Narrative oriented inquiry: A dynamic model for good practice. In D Robinson et al (Eds) *Narrative, Memory and Identities*. Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield Press

Hotlz, T. H. (1998). Refugee trauma verses torture trauma: A retrospective controlled cohort study of Tibetan refugees. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 186, 24–34.

Husserl, E. (1913) *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. Trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson (1931). London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

Hyvärinen, M. (2006). Towards a conceptual history of narrative. In M. Hyvärinen, A. Korhonen, & J. Mykkänen (Eds.), *The travelling concept of narrative.* Retrieved from: http://www.helsinki.fi/collegium/e-series/volumes/volume_1/001_04_hyvarinen.pdf

Hyvärinen, M. (2010). Revisiting the narrative turns. *Life Writing*, 7(1), 69-82.

Hunsaker, R. (2011). Counseling and Social Justice. *Academic Questions*. 24. 319-340

Ionescu, A. (2019). *Witnessing Horrorism: The Piteşti Experiment*. Slovo , 32 (1) , Article 4

Jamieson, R., Shirlow, P., & Grounds, A. (2010). *Ageing and social exclusion among former politically motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland*. The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland.

Jaspers, K. (1919). *Psychology of Worldviews*. Berlin: Verlag von Julius Springer.

Jaspers, K. (1951). *The Way to Wisdom*, [trans. R. Manheim], New Haven CT and London: Yale University Press.

Jaspers, K. (1971). *Philosophy of Existence.* University of Pennsylvania Press

Jeon, Y. (2004). The application of grounded theory and symbolic interactionism. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences*, 18(3), 249-256

Johnson, R. (2009). Oppression Embodied. *The USA Body Psychotherapy Journal,* 8 (1), 19-31

Jun, H. (2018). Social Justice, Multicultural Counseling, and Practice

Kagan, C., Tindall, C., & Robinson, J. (2010). Community Psychology: Linking the Individual with the Community. In R. Woolfe, S. Strawbridge, B. Douglas, & W. Dryden. (Eds.) *Handbook of Counselling Psychology* (3rd Ed) (pp.484-503). London: Sage.

Kagee, A. (2004). Present concerns of survivors of human rights violations in South Africa. *Social Science & Medicine,* 59(3):625-35

Kahana, B., Kahana, E. F., Harel, Z., & Segal, M. (1986). The victim as helper: Prosocial behaviour during the Holocaust. *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations, 13*(1), 357-373.

Kasket, E. (2012). The counselling psychologist researcher. *Counselling Psychology Review*, 27(2), 64–73

Kemp, W. (1996). 'Narrative', in Nelson and Shiff (1996), *Critical terms for art history*, Chicago, p.58–69

Kessler, R. C., Berglund, P., Demler, O., Jin, R., Merikangas, K., Walters, R., et al. (2005). Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 62(6), 593–602.

Kiselica, M. S., & Robinson, M. (2001). Bringing advocacy counseling to life: e history, issues, and human dramas of social justice work in counseling. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 79*, 387–398.

Lambert, M.J. (1992). 'Implications of outcome research for psychotherapy integration', in J.C. Norcross and M.R. Goldstein (eds), *Handbook of Psychotherapy Integration*. New York: Basic Books, pp. 94-129.

Langdridge, D. (2006). Solution Focused Therapy: A Way Forward for Brief Existential Therapy? In *Existential Analysis*, 17.2: pp.359-370.

Langdridge, D. (2007). *Phenomenological Psychology: Theory, Research and Method.* London: Pearson Education.

Lichtenberg, J. W. (2017). *Reflections*, *45*(1), 113-124

Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. (2005) Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions, and Emerging Confluences. In: Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S., Eds., *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd Edition, Sage, Thousand Oaks, 191-215

Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (2013). *The Constructivist Credo*. Left Coast Press

Lloyd-Jones, E. McDonald., Westervelt, E. M. (1963). *Behavioural science and guidance: proposals and perspectives. Freedom and Responsibility Re-Examined by Rollo May (p.103).* New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University.
Retrieved from https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015062958189&view=1up&seq=119

Love, B. J. (2000). Developing a liberatory consciousness. In M. Adams (Ed.), *Readings for diversity and social justice* (pp. 470-474). New York: Routledge.

Losch, A. (2009). On the Origins of Critical Realism. *Theology and Science*.**7** (1): 85–106.

Lukes, S. (2008). *Moral relativism*. New York, NY: Picador.

Maercker, A., Beauducel, A., & Schützwohl, M. (2000). Trauma severity and initial reactions as precipitating factors for posttraumatic stress symptoms and chronic dissociation in former political prisoners. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 13(4), 651–660.

MacLeod, R.B. (1947). The phenomenological approach to social psychology. *Psychological Review*, Vol 54(4), pp.193-210.

Mallett, O. & Wapshott, R. (2011). The challenges of identity work: developing Ricoeurian narrative identity in organisations. *Ephemera* 11(3): 271-288

Manen, M. van (1990). *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Marcus, P. and Rosenberg, A. (1988). A philosophical critique of the "Survivor Syndrome" and some implications for treatment. In R. L. Braham (Ed.), *The psychological perspectives of the Holocaust and of its Aftermath* (pp. 53-78). New York: Columbia University Press.

Marcuse, H. (1948), 'Existentialism: Remarks on Jean-Paul Sartre's L'Etre et le Néant,' *Philosophical and Phenomenological Research,* vol.8, n.3, March (pp.309-336)

Margalit, A. (2004). *The Ethics of Memory*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press

May, R. (1977). *The Meaning of Anxiety*. New York: Norton and Co Inc.

May, R. (1981). Freedom and destiny. New York: Norton & Co. Inc

May, R. (1983). *The Discovery of Being.* New York: Norton and Co Inc.

McAdams, D. P. (1993). *The stories we live by: Personal myths and the making of the self.* New York: Morrow.

McAdams, D. P. (1996). Personality, modernity and the storied self: A contemporary framework for studying persons. *Psychological Inquiry*, *7*(4) 295-321.

McGinley, P. (2006). The Question of Existential/ Phenomenological Therapy. *Existential Analysis* 17.2: pp. 301-11.

McKay, R. (2003). Family resilience and good child outcomes: an overview of the research literature. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand.* n.20:p.98-118

McLaughlin, C. (2003). The feeling of finding out: the role of emotions in research. *Education Action Research,* 11 (1). pp. 65-78

McLeod, J. (2000). *Qualitative research in counselling and psychotherapy*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

McLeod, J. (2003). *Doing Counselling Research* (2ⁿᵈ edn). London: Sage Publications Ltd.

McDonough, R. M. (2006). *Martin Heidegger's "Being and Time"*. Bern: Peter Lang.

Meichenbaum, D. (2006). Resilience and posttraumatic growth: A constructive narrative perspective. In L. G. Calhoun, & R. G. Tedeschi (Eds.), *Handbook of posttraumatic growth: Research & practice.* (pp. 355-367). Mahwah, NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Meichenbaum, D. (2012). *Roadmap to resilience: A guide for military, trauma victims and their families.* Institute Press.

Merleau-Ponty, M. ([1945] 1962). *Phenomenology of Perception* (C. Smith, trans). London: Routledge.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1973). *Adventures of the dialectic* (J. Bien, Trans.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press. (Transl. of *Les aventures de la dialectique*, 1955.)

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964). *Sense and Nonsense*. Northwestern University Press

Milton, M. (2010). *Therapy and Beyond: Counselling psychology contributions to therapeutic and social issues.* Wiley-Blackwell.

Minkowski, E. (1933). *Lived Time: Phenomenological and Psychopathological Studies,* trans. N. Mekel (1970), Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press.

Mishler, E. G. (1991). *Research interviewing: Context and narrative.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Mishler, E. G. (2006). Narrative and identity: The double arrow of time. In A. De Fina, D. Schiffrin, & M. Bamberg (Eds.), *Discourse and identity* (pp. 30-47). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press

Muller, H. (1998). *The Land of Green Plums*. Michael Hofmann (trans.). Northwestern University Press

Naveh, G.S. (2004). "Culture as Violence: 'Educating' Political Prisoners in Romania " in Mydrene Anderson (Ed), *Cultural Shaping of Violence* (pp.258-268). USA: Purdue University Press.

Neculau A. (1999). *Memoria pierdută*. Iaşi, Polirom.

Nelson, K. L., & Horowitz, L. (2001). Narrative structure in recounted sad memories. *Discourse Processes*, 31, 307–324

Nietzsche, F. (1962). Philosophy in the tragic age of the Greeks. (Marianne Cowen *Guidelines*.(http://www.bps.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/professional_practice_guidelines_-_division_of_counselling_psychology.pdf). March, 2012.

National Institute of Clinical Excellence, (2005).*Post traumatic stress disorder*: *The management of PTSD in adults and children in primary and secondary care*. National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence

Neimeyer, R. A. (1998). Social constructionism in the counselling context, *11*(2), 135-149

Olick, J. K, and Robbins, J. (1998). Social Memory Studies: From Collective Memory to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices. *Annual Review of Sociology, pp*. 105-40.

Olson, A.M. (1979). *Transcendence and Hermeneutics*. Martinus Nijhoff Publishers

Orlans, V., & Scoyoc, S. V. (2009). *A short introduction to counselling psychology*. Sage: Publications Ltd

Palaganas, E. C., Sanchez, M. C., Molintas, M. P., & Caricativo, R. D. (2017). Reflexivity in Qualitative Research: A Journey of Learning. *Qualitative Report*, 22(2), 426-438.

Palmer, A., & Parish, J. (2008). Social Justice and Counselling Psychology: Situating the Role of Graduate Student Research, Education and Training, *42*(4).

Parker, I. (1992). *Discourse dynamics*. London: Routledge.

Parker, I. (2005). *Qualitative Psychology – Introducing Radical Research*. Buckingham: Open University Press

Pieterse, A.L., Evans, S.R., Risner-Butner, A., Collins, N.M. & Mason, L.B. (2009). Multicultural competence and social justice training in counselling psychology and counsellor education: A review and analysis of a sample of multicultural course syllabi. *The Counselling Psychologist*, 37(1), 93-115.

Pitkin H.F. (1988). Are Freedom and Liberty Twins? *Political Theory.*16(4):523-552.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995). Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 8, 5-23

Polkinghorne, D.E. (2006) Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 8:1, 5-23

Polkinghorne D.E. (2007). Validity Issues in Narrative Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*. 13(4):471-486.

Ponterotto, J. G. (1997). Multicultural training: A competency model and national survey. In D. B. Pope-Davis & H. L. K. Coleman (Eds.), *Multicultural counseling competencies: Assessment, education, training, and supervision* (pp. 111-130). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ponterotto, J. G. (2005). Qualitative research in counselling psychology: A primer on research paradigms and philosophy of science. *Journal of Counselling Psychology, 52*(2), 126–136

Raskin, J. D. (2008). The evolution of constructivism. Journal of Constructivist Psychology, 21(1), 1–24

Ratts, M., D'Andrea, M., & Arredondo, P. (2004). Social justice counseling: "Fifth force" in field. *Counseling Today, 47,* 28-30.

Rebassoo, P. (2008). *Long-term consequences of political imprisonment and torture on former political prisoners in Estonia*. (Ph.D. Thesis) Germany: Der Universitat Konstanz.

Ricoeur, P. (1965). *History and truth.* Northwestern University Press
Ricoeur, P. (1970). *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*. [trans. D. Savage]. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Ricoeur, P. (1984). *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1 [trans. K. McLaughlin & D. Pellauer]. Chicago, Il: University of Chicago Press.

Ricoeur, P. (1985). *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 2 [trans. K. McLaughlin & D. Pellauer]. Chicago, Il: University of Chicago Press.

Ricoeur, P. (1988). *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 4 [trans. K. McLaughlin & D. Pellauer]. Chicago, Il: University of Chicago Press.
Ricoeur, P. (1992). *Soi-même comme un autre*, Paris: Seuil, 1990; translated as *Oneself as Another*, by Kathleen Blamey, Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Ricoeur, P. (2016). *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. Cambridge University Press.

Ricoeur, P. (1980). Narrative time. *Critical Inquiry*, *7*(1), 169-190.

Riessman, C.K. (2008). *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. CA, USA: Sage Publications

Russell, J.S. (2014) Resilience, *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 42:2, 159-183

Saporta, J. A., & van der Kolk, B. A. (1992). Psychobiological consequences of severe trauma. In M. Basoglu, *Torture and its consequences* (pp. 151-181). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press

Sarbin, T. R. (1986). *Narrative psychology: The storied nature of human conduct* (pp. 3-21). Westport, CT, US: Praeger Publishers/Greenwood Publishing Group.

Sartre, J.-P. ([1943] 1956). *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. [trans. H. Barnes]. New York: Philosophical Library.

Sartre, J.P. (1957). The Humanism of Existentialism. In C.G. Guignon & D. Pereboom (2.), *Existentialism Basic Writings* (pp. 290-308). (B, Frechtman, Trans.). Indianapolis, IA: Hackett.

Sartre, J.P. (1992) *Notebooks for an Ethics*. Trans. David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Sartre, J.P. (2007). Existentialism is a humanism = (L'Existentialisme est un humanisme); including, a commentary on The stranger (Explication de L'Étranger). New Haven :Yale University Press

Scarfe, L. (2015). Pointing at the moon. Exploring the question: What is psychological freedom? [online]. Available at: https://www.iapop.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Scarfe-L_Pointing-At-the-Moon_What-is-psychological-freedom.pdf [Accessed 2 April 2020]

Schiff, B. (2006). The promise (and challenge) of an innovative narrative psychology. *Narrative Inquiry*, *16*(1), 19-27.

Schneider, K. J. (2010, Sept.) The case for existential therapy. *Psychology Today*.[online] Available at: https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/search/site/kirk%20schneider [Accessed 5 May 2019]

Sedikides, C., & Brewer, M. B. (2001). Individual self, relational self, collective self. Philadelphia, PA: *Psychology Press*.

Shestov L.(1969) *Kierkegaard et la philosophie existentielle (Vox clamantis in deserto)*. Paris, 1936; English: *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*. Ohio

Shestov L. (1966) . *Athens and Jerusalem*. Ohio; N.Y

Shestov, L. (1920). *All Things are Possible*. London : M. Secker

Shinebourne, P. (2011). The Theoretical Underpinnings of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis, Vol. 22(1), pp.16-31.

Silverman, D. (2005). *Doing Qualitative Research*: A Practical. 2nd edn. Sage Publications

Smith, J.A., Flowers, P., Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*. London: Sage.

Solzhenitsyn, A. (1973). *The Gulag Archipelago*(1st ed.). Harper & Row

Sora, M. (1947*). Du dialogue intérieur*, Paris, Editions Gallimard

Şora, M. (1999). *Firul ierbii.* Craiova, Scrisul Românesc,

Sora, M. (2007). *Eu & Tu & El & Ea ... sau dialogul generalizat*, Editura Humanitas, Bucuresti

Souto-Manning, M. (2014). Critical narrative analysis: The interplay of critical discourse and narrative analyses. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. 27 (2),159-180

Spinelli, E. (2001). *The Mirror and the Hammer*. London: Sage

Spinelli, E. (1994). *Demystifying Therapy*. London: Constable

Spinelli, E. (2007). *Practising existential psychotherapy*. 1st ed. Los Angeles: SAGE

Steel, Z., Chey, T., Silove, D., Marne, C., Bryant, R. A., & Ommeren, M. V. (2009). Association of torture and other potentially traumatic events with mental health outcomes among populations exposed to mass conflict and displacement: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 302(5), 537–549.

Steinhardt, N (1991). *Jurnalul Fericirii*. Cluj: Dacia

Stolorow, R. (2007). *Trauma and Human Existence: Autobiographical, Psychoanalytic, and Philosophical Reflections*. New York: Routledge

Stolorow, R. (2008). The Contextuality of Emotional Trauma in *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 18

Strawbridge, S. and Woolfe, R. (2010). Counselling psychology: Origins, developments and challenges. In R. Woolfe, S. Strawbridge, B. Douglas & W. Dryden (Eds.), *Handbook of Counselling Psychology* (3rd ed.), pp.3–22. London: Sage Publications Ltd

Summerfield, D. (1999). A critique of seven assumptions behind psychological trauma programmes in war-affected areas. *Social Science & Medicine, 48*, 1449–1462.

Summerfield, D. (2001). The invention of post-traumatic stress disorder and the social usefulness of a psychiatric category. *Student British Medical Journal, 9*, 61–64.

Szasz, T. (1974). *The Myth of Mental Illness: Foundations of a Theory of Personal Conduct.* Revised edition. New York: Harper & Row.

Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G. (1996). The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory: Measuring the positive legacy of trauma. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 9*(3), 455–472

Thiselton, A. (1992). *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan Pub House

Tileaga, C. (2012). Communism and the meaning of social memory: Towards a critical-interpretive approach. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioural S*cience, 46(4), 475-49

Tillich, P. ([1952] 2000). *The Courage to Be*. Yale: University Press.

Tismăneanu, V. (1998): *Fantasies of Salvation.* Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press

Todorova, M. & Gille, Zsuzsa. (2010*). Post-communist nostalgia*. Berghahn Books

Toporek, R. L., Gerstein, L. H., Fouad, N. A., Roysircar, G., & Israel, T. (2006). *Handbook of social justice in counseling psychology.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ulman, S. E. (1996). Correlates and consequences of adult sexual disclosure. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, II, 554-571.

Ursa, M. (2008). Women Imprisoned. History and (Her)story. *Memoires du prison*. Vol.15**,** pp. 78-93

Văcărescu, T., (2003). Women and/in the communist political prisons: the first and the second circle of suffering, Romania 1947-1965. *Romanian journal of society and politics,* **3**(1), pp. 7-45.

Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy.* State University of New York Press, Albany

Van Nes, F., Abma, T., Jonsson, H., & Deeg, D. (2010). Language differences in qualitative research: is meaning lost in translation? *European Journal of Ageing*, *7*(4), 313–316

Van Deurzen-Smith, E., Arnold-Baker, C. (2005). *Existential Perspectives on Human Issues*, Palgrave McMillan : New York

Van Der Kolk, B. (2014). *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma,* 1ˢᵗ Edition, Viking Books

Vera, E. M., & Speight, S. L. (2003). Multicultural competence, social justice, and counseling psychology: Expanding our roles*. The Counseling Psychologist, 31,* 253-272.

Vera, E. M., & Speight, S. L. (2007). Advocacy, outreach, and prevention: Integrating social action roles in professional training*. In E. Aldarondo (Ed.), Advancing social justice through clinical practice (pp. 373-390).* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum*.*

Walsh, F. (1998) *Strengthening Family Resilience*. The Guilford Press, New York

Walsh, Y. and Frankland, F. (2009). The next 10 years: Some reflections on earlier predictions for Counselling Psychology. *Counselling Psychology Review,* Vol. 24, No. 1, pp.38-43

Warnock, M. (1970). *Existentialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Watts, R. J. (2004). Integrating social justice and psychology. *The Counseling Psychologist, 32*, 855-865.

Weißflog, G., Daig, I., Klinitzke, G., & Brahler, E. (2012). Somatic complaints after political imprisonment and their relation to anxiety and depression. *Verhaltenstherapie,* 22 (000-000).

Wertz, F.J., (2005). Phenomenological research methods for counselling psychology. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, Vol 52(2), pp.167-177.

What is counselling psychology? (n.d.). On the *Division of Counselling Psychology* website. [online] Retrieved 18th September 2012 from http://dcop.bps.org.uk/dcop/home/about/about_home.cfm

White, M. (2000). Reflections on narrative practice. Adelaide, South Australia: Dulwich Publications.

Willig, C. (2012) Perspectives on the epistemological bases for qualitative research, in H. Cooper (ed.) *The Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association

Willig, C. (2013). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology*. London: McGraw-Hill. Education

Willis, S., Chou, S., & Hunt, N. (2015). A systematic review on the effect of political imprisonment on mental health. *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, 25A, 173-183.

Wiggins, S. and Riley, S. (2010). QM1: Discourse Analysis. In M.A. Forrester. *Doing Qualitative Research in Psychology: A Practical Guide*. pp. 135-153. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Woodcock, S. (2014). 'Against a Wall': Albania's women political prisoners' struggle to be heard. *Cultural Studies Review, 20*(2), 65.

Woodhouse, S.. et al (2018). A social model of posttraumatic stress disorder: Interpersonal trauma, attachment, group identification, disclosure, social acknowledgement, and negative cognitions. *Journal of Theoretical Social Psychology*, Vol. 2 (2), pp. 34-48

Woolfe, R. (1996). The nature of counselling psychology. In R. Woolfe and W. Dryden (Eds.), *Handbook of Counselling Psychology*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Yardley, L. (2000). Dilemmas in qualitative health research, *Psychology & Health*, 15:2, 215-228

Young, K. (2004). Frame and boundary in the phenomenology of narrative. In M.-L. Ryan (Ed.), *Narrative across media: The languages of storytelling* (pp. 76-107). Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press

6. *Appendices*

Appendix I: Ethical Approval Documentation

Appendix II: Participant Information Sheet

Appendix III: Participant Consent Form

Appendix IV: Debriefing Sheet

Appendix V: Ethical Approval

Appendix VI: Critical Narrative Analysis Example Extract

Appendix VII: Full Participant Review Transcript

Appendix I

Ethical Approval Application Documentation

Middlesex University Department of Psychology Ethics Committee

Application for Ethical Approval and Risk Assessment

Psychology Department

REQUEST FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

Applicant (specify): Oana Barnett

No study may proceed until approval has been granted by an authorised person. For collaborative research with another institution, ethical approval must be obtained from all institutions involved. If you are involved in a project that has already received ethical approval from another committee or that will be seeking approval from another ethics committee, please complete form '**Application for Approval of Proposals Previously Approved by another Ethics Committee or to be Approved by another Ethics Committee'**

UG and MSc STUDENTS: Please email the completed form to your supervisor from your University email account (...@live.mdx.ac.uk). Your supervisor will then send your application to the Ethics Committee (Psy.Ethics@mdx.ac.uk). You should NOT email the ethics committee directly.

PhD Students and STAFF: Please email the completed form to Psy.Ethics@mdx.ac.uk from your University email account (OB242@mdx.ac.uk)

This form consists of 8 sections:
1) Summary of Application and Declaration
2) Ethical questions
3) Research proposal
4) Information sheet

5) Informed consent

6) Debriefing

7) Risk assessment (required if research is to be conducted away from Middlesex University property, otherwise leave this blank. Institutions/locations listed for data collection must match original letters of acceptance)

8) Reviewer's decision and feedback

Once your file including proposal, information sheet, consent form, debriefing and (if necessary) materials and Risk Assessment form is ready, please check the size. For files exceeding 3MB, please email your application to your supervisor using WeTransfer: https://www.wetransfer.com/ this will place your application in cloud storage rather than sending it directly to a specific email account. If you/ your supervisor have confidentiality concerns, please submit a paper copy of your application to the Psychology Office instead of proceeding with the electronic submission.

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Application No.:	Click here to enter text.	Decision:	Click here to enter text.	Date:	Click here to enter a date.

Required:	☐ Yes ☐ No	Signed by:	☐ Student ☐ Supervisor
			☐ Programme Leader
Date:	Click here to enter a date.		

RISK ASSESSMENT *(complete relevant boxes)*:

LETTER/S OF ACCEPTANCE/PERMISSION MATCHING FRA1 (RISK ASSESSMENT) RECEIVED (SPECIFY):

	Date	From	Checked by	
All	Click here to enter a date.	Click here to enter text.	☐ Supervisor	☐ Ethics Admin
Part	Click here to enter a date.	Click here to enter text.	☐ Supervisor	☐ Ethics Admin
Part	Click here to enter a date.	Click here to enter text.	☐ Supervisor	☐ Ethics Admin

DBS certificate required?	Click here to choose an item.	Seen By:	Choose an item.
DBS Certificate Number:		Date DBS Issued:	Click here to enter a date.

DBS Certificate(s) Required? *(complete relevant boxes)*:

1   Summary of application (researcher to complete)

Title of Proposal:	**An existential phenomenological exploration of the lived experience of freedom in former political prisoners of the Romanian Communist Gulag**
Name of Principal Investigator/Supervisor	Emmy Van Deurzen
Name of Student Researcher(s) and student number(s)	Oana Laura Barnett

Please click one of the following:

◯ UG Student   ⦿ PHD/MPHIL Student   ◯ MSc Student

◯ Staff

Proposed start date	15/05/17	**Proposed end date**	15/06/18

Details of any co-investigators (if applicable)

1. Name: Click here to enter text.	Organisation: Click here to enter text.	Email: Click here to enter text.
2. Name: Click here to enter text.	Organisation: Click here to enter text.	Email: Click here to enter text.
3. Name: Click here to enter text.	Organisation: Click here to enter text.	Email: Click here to enter text.

Topic/Research Area (tick as many as apply)

☑ Social/Psychosocial   ☐ Occupational   ☐ Forensic   ☐ Developmental   ☐ Sport & Exercise

☑ Cognition & Emotion   ☐ Psychoanalysis   ☑ Clinical   ☐ Psychophysiological   ☐ Health

Methodology (tick as many as apply)

1.1	Are there any sensitive elements to this study (delete as appropriate)? *If you are unclear about what this means in relation to your research, please discuss with your Supervisor first*	YES
1.2	If the study involves any of the first three groups above, the researcher may need a DBS certificate (Criminal Records Check). PG students are expected to have DBS clearance. Does the current project require DBS clearance? *Discuss this matter with your supervisor if you unsure*	YES
1.3	Does the study involve ANY of the following? Cl*inical populations; Children (under 16 years); Vulnerable adults such as individuals with mental or physical health problems, prisoners, vulnerable elderly, young offenders; Political, ethnic or religious groups/minorities; Sexually explicit material / issues relating to sexuality*; *Mood induction; Deception*	**YES**
1.4	Is this a resubmission / amended application? *If so, you must attach the original application with the review decision and comments (you do not need to re-attach materials etc if the resubmission does not concern alterations to these). Please note that in the case of complex and voluminous applications, it is the responsibility of the applicant to identify the amended parts of the resubmission.*	NO

☑ Qualitative ☐ Experimental ☐ Field Experiments ☑ Questionnaire

☐ Observation (humans and non-humans) ☐ Analysis of Existing Data Source/Secondary Data Analysis

By submitting this form you confirm that:

- you are aware that any modifications to the design or method of the proposal will require resubmission.

- students will keep all materials, documents and data relating to this proposal until completion of your studies at Middlesex, in compliance with confidentiality guidelines (i.e., only you and your supervisor will be able to access the data).

- staff will keep all materials, documents and data relating to this proposal until the appropriate time after completion of the project, in compliance with confidentiality guidelines (i.e., only you and other members of your team will be able to access the data).

- students will provide all original paper and electronic data to the supervisor named on this form on completion of the research / dissertation submission.

- you have read and understood the British Psychological Society's *Code of Ethics and Conduct,* and *Code of Human Research Ethics.*

2. Ethical questions – all questions must be answered

2.1	Will you inform participants of their right to withdraw from the research at any time, without penalty?	YES
2.2	Will you provide a full debriefing at the end of the data collection phase?	YES
2.3	Will you be available to discuss the study with participants, if necessary, to monitor any negative effects or misconceptions?	YES
2.4	Under the Data Protection Act, participant information is confidential unless otherwise agreed in advance. Will participant anonymity be guaranteed?	YES
2.5	Is this research or part of it going to be conducted in a language other than English? *Note, full translations of all non-English materials must be provided and attached to this document*	YES
2.6	Is this research to be conducted only at Middlesex University? *If not, a completed Risk Assessment form - see Section 8 – must be completed, and permission from any hosting or collaborative institution must be obtained by letter or email, and appended to this document, before data collection can commence. If you are conducting an online survey or interviews via skype or telephone whilst you are at Middlesex University you do not need to fill in the risk assessment form.*	NO

If you have answered 'No' to questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 above, please justify/discuss this below, outlining the measures you have taken to ensure participants are being dealt with in an ethical way.

The research will be conducted in Romania, Bucharest. The interviews will take place at the Aquamarin Clinic, Decebal Boulevard 6, Bucharest, Romania– a psychotherapy clinic and provider of counselling psychology training. The institution has provided written permission to host the research interviewing process on its premises.

Are there any ethical issues that concern you about this particular piece of research, not covered elsewhere on this form? If so please outline them below

The topic of this research is highly personal and likely to bring up painful emotions and traumatic experiences for the participants. To address this concern, I will provide the participants with a debriefing letter in which I will include my details and signposting to psychotherapy services – should they desire further support. One method I have thought of using (commonly employed in phenomenological research) is to send the participant the questions that will be asked, so that they are better able to judge whether the issue is a sensitive one for them and choose to participate after being informed fully about the nature of the study.

Another concern relates to the age of the participants (80+) and the process of interviewing individuals who are sick, frail or dependent, as they could display vulnerabilities and sensitivities that are not always visible or known. If the research has such an impact, the participants will be offered support (I am an accredited psychotherapist) and be signposted to either Aquamarin Clinic or another psychotherapy provider. Given the age of the participants, I will ensure that support or medical cover is on hand is essential. Also, care will be taken to ensure that information sheets, consent forms and other documents use larger font sizes/braille and/or vocabulary that is appropriate for the study population, due to potential visual impairments.

Another challenging research ethics issue relates to obtaining properly informed and freely given consent from those who are in some way dependent on family carers, professional carers or others, live in institutional settings and might have diminished cognitive capacity due to their old age. To address these issues, I will follow the best research ethics practice and obtain the co-operation and trust of family or professional carers who have medical or social care responsibilities, should that be needed. If the participants' cognitive capacity is severely diminished, they will not be included in the study.

Research proposal

Aims and Hypotheses/Research Questions

I intend to explore the subjective experiences of freedom in former political prisoners of the Romanian Communist Gulag. The nature of my research question is open ended enquiry, as I want to elicit rich descriptions of lived experience hence, I will be using qualitative methodology.

Supporting literature and rationale

In seeking an angle from which to explore the experiences of freedom during and in the aftermath of the Communist Fall I was struck by the absence of research covering this particular topic and subgroup.

There hasn't been much written on how former political prisoners experienced their freedom/oppression from an existential perspective. Most of the research articles conducted on former political detainees have focused on the long-term consequences of traumatic experiences (Bichescu et al, 2005; Maercker et al, 2010, Halvosen, 2010) and the analysis has viewed the experience from different theoretical perspectives, mainly clinical psychology.

Whist I am not denying the usefulness of clinical research focusing on the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder, I am of the opinion that the medicalization of their whole political, cultural, communal and existential suffering could be invalidating and decontextualizing the subjective experiences of political prisoners, to the point where one risks contributing to the efforts of their persecutors.

I believe that what is missing from the current literature is an existential exploration of freedom restriction as it was experienced and lived by this specific subgroup, an attempt to understand how these prisoners experienced their freedom before, during and after their political incarceration and how it impacted on their existence. I also believe that there is a need to investigate how ex-political prisoners make sense of their lives post detention and how the carceral experience changed their sense of freedom.

Design

My sampling for this study is purposive and homogeneous. I will be recruiting participants who share the experience at the heart of the investigation (political incarceration) and, if possible, do not vary significantly across demographic characteristics. The aim is to recruit a sample of people such that I can make claims about these people and their particular shared experience. This study is an idiographic one and my aim is not to generalize beyond this particular sample, but to develop detailed descriptions of the experience of a small number of people who all shared that experience. I will be using Critical Narrative Analysis, as it is very close to my philosophical and epistemological stance and I am interested in researching the narratives of lived experience of freedom/ oppression of my participants over a long stretch of time. My research interest is also concerned with the narrative identities of my participants and how their stories of freedom or oppression might compare to a dominant counter-narrative. According to Langdridge (2011), CNA is a particularly suitable for researchers interested in conducting work on topics which are clearly and directly inflected with issues of power and politics.

Participants

I aim to interview 6-8 former political prisoners of the Communist regime, who had the experience of being incarcerated in one of the labour camps of the Romanian Gulag. I will include all socio-economic classes, professions and both sexes.

Procedures

I intend to send an email with recruitment information to charities and national agencies (The Romanian Association of Ex Political Prisoners, the National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism) and ask them to use the attached flyer on their websites or newsletter. I will also liaise with fellow psychotherapists or university colleagues in Bucharest, as well as acquaintances and friends, asking them to place the flyer on university boards or health centres of freedom and oppression before, during and after political incarceration.

Participants will be invited to take part in a semi-structured interview in order to explore and discuss their experiences. The interviews will be conducted at a neutral location, in a counselling room within a well-staffed and safe building that I will rent out at the Aquamarin Mental Health Clinic, Decebal Boulevard 6, Bucharest, 030966, Romania. Interviews will be conducted during regular hours and at a time where several members of staff are in the building. These will be conducted in Romanian and recorded digitally ; I will be personally transcribing it. Data will be kept confidential under password protection on my personal computer and will be deleted once my dissertation is marked.

Given that the interview might elicit some painful memories/ feelings, the participants will be able to discuss these in a confidential setting, following interviewing process. They will also be given a debriefing letter including the name of a therapist, should they wish to seek further support at a later time. All identifying information will be fully disguised, including names, occupations and backgrounds.

With the participant's consent, I will be using extracts from the interview. The research will be carried our according to the Code of Ethics of the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) and the British Psychological Society (BPS)

References

CNSS, (2003)   U.S. Committee on National Security Systems (CNSS). National Policy on the Use of Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) to Protect National Security Systems and National Security Information, CNSS Policy No.15, Fact Sheet No.1, June 2003.

Langdridge, D. (2007a). *Phenomenological Psychology: Theory, Research and Method.* London: Pearson Education.

1   7. INDEPENDENT FIELD/LOCATION WORK RISK ASSESSMENT FRA1

This proforma is applicable to, and must be completed in advance for, the following field/location work situations:

1. *All field/location work undertaken independently by individual students, either in the UK or overseas, including in connection with proposition module or dissertations. Supervisor to complete with student(s).*

2. *All field/location work undertaken by postgraduate students. Supervisors to complete with student(s).*

3. *Field/location work undertaken by research students. Student to complete with supervisor.*

4. *Field/location work/visits by research staff. Researcher to complete with Research Centre Head.*

5. *Essential information for students travelling abroad can be found on* www.fco.gov.uk

FIELD/LOCATION WORK DETAILS

Name:	Oana Barnett	Student No Research Centre:(staff only)	
Supervisor:	Prof. Dr. Emmy Van Deurzen and Dr. Neil Lamont	Degree course	DcPsych

NEXT OF KIN Telephone numbers and name of next of kin who may be contacted in the event of an accident	Name: Mircea Pavel Phone:0040722410941
Physical or psychological limitations to carrying out the proposed field/location work	none
Any health problems (full details) Which may be relevant to proposed field/location work activity in case of emergencies.	none
Locality (Country and Region)	Bucharest, Romania
Travel Arrangements NB: Comprehensive travel and health insurance must always be obtained for independent overseas field/location work.	Driving to and from the airport, flying from London to Bucharest and back, driving to and from the hotel, walking or using public transport to travel to the interview room (or alternative locations) in Bucharest.
Dates of Travel and Field/location work	June 2017 (specific dates to be confirmed)

1.1.1. PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION VERY CAREFULLY

1.1.2 <u>Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment</u>

List the localities to be visited or specify routes to be followed **(Col. 1).** For each locality, enter the potential hazards that may be identified beyond those accepted in everyday life. Add details giving cause for concern **(Col. 2).**

Examples of Potential Hazards :
Adverse weather: exposure (heat, sunburn, lightening, wind, hypothermia)
Terrain: rugged, unstable, fall, slip, trip, debris, and remoteness. Traffic: pollution.
Demolition/building sites, assault, getting lost, animals, disease.
Working on/near water: drowning, swept away, disease (weils disease, hepatitis, malaria, etc), parasites', flooding, tides and range.
Lone working: difficult to summon help, alone or in isolation, lone interviews.
Dealing with the public: personal attack, causing offence/intrusion, misinterpreted, political, ethnic, cultural, socio-economic differences/problems. Known or suspected criminal offenders.
Safety Standards (other work organisations, transport, hotels, etc), working at night, areas of high crime.
Ill health: personal considerations or vulnerabilities, pre-determined medical conditions (asthma, allergies, fitting) general fitness, disabilities, persons suited to task.

Articles and equipment: inappropriate type and/or use, failure of equipment, insufficient training for use and repair, injury. Substances (chemicals, plants, bio- hazards, waste): ill health - poisoning, infection, irritation, burns, cuts, eye-damage. Manual handling: lifting, carrying, moving large or heavy items, physical unsuitability for task

If no hazard can be identified beyond those of everyday life, enter 'NONE'.

1. LOCALITY/ROUTE	2. POTENTIAL HAZARDS
Aquamarin Clinic, Decebal Boulevard 6, Bucharest, 030966, Romania **Also, potential other rented consulting room nearer to participants' home if the above address is not suitable.**	Lone working – the interview will be conducted by me with the participant and no other in the room Dealing with the public – there could be a potential risk of causing offence, intruding or being misinterpreted Ill health: given the old of the participants, there is a higher likelihood of medical conditions (hearing problems, allergies, COPD, reduced mobility and fitness) Failure of equipment – breakdown of digital recorder

1.1.2. ***The University Field/location work code of Practice booklet provides practical advice that should be followed in planning and conducting field/location work.***

1.1.4.

1.1.5. <u>Risk Minimisation/Control Measures</u>   **PLEASE READ VERY CAREFULLY**

For each hazard identified **(Col 2),** list the precautions/control measures in place or that will be taken **(Col 3)** to **"reduce the risk to acceptable levels",** and the safety equipment **(Col 5)** that will be employed.

Assuming the safety precautions/control methods that will be adopted **(Col. 3),** categorise the field/location work risk for each location/route as negligible, low, moderate or high **(Col. 4). Risk increases with both the increasing likelihood of an accident and the increasing severity of the consequences of an accident.**

An acceptable level of risk is: a risk which can be safely controlled by person taking part in the activity using the precautions and control measures noted including the necessary instructions, information and training relevant to that risk. The resultant risk should not be significantly higher than that encountered in everyday life.

Examples of control measures/precautions:
Training in interview techniques and avoiding /defusing conflict, following advice from local organisations, wearing of clothing unlikely to cause offence or unwanted attention. Interviews in neutral locations. Checks on Health and Safety standards & welfare facilities of travel, accommodation and outside organisations. Seek information on social/cultural/political status of field/location work area.

If a proposed locality has not been visited previously, give your authority for the risk assessment stated or indicate that your visit will be preceded by a thorough risk assessment.

3. PRECAUTIONS/CONTROL MEASURES	4. RISK ASSESSMENT (low, moderate, high)	5. SAFETY/EQUIPMENT
1. Potential risk: Lone Working – the interviews will be conducted by me with the participant and no other in the room CONTROL = the building where I will be conducting the interview is heavily staffed and there are other consulting rooms on the same level. The interviews will take place within standard operating hours and there will be no time when I am alone in the building with the participant(s). In the event that attention is required, I have a safety alarm and a mobile phone. I will make sure that I inform a member of staff of the timings of the interviews and promptly let them know when they ended. In the event of having to meet a participant at an alternative location, I will make sure that they are well staffed and the above conditions will be applied.	Low Low	Mobile phone, safety alarm
2. Potential risk: Dealing with the public – there could be a potential risk of causing offence, intruding or being misinterpreted CONTROL = Participants will be asked to reflect on an experience they have had and since they would be electing to take part while being furnished with comprehensive details of the purpose of the study and what will be involved, the intention is that they will be able to make an informed judgement for themselves if this is an acceptable level of risk that they are prepared to take. However, it will also be made explicit to		

participants that they will be able to end the interview at any time. Further, the information sheet will advise that there may be a possibility that talking about one's experience of counselling could generate uncomfortable feelings and that, should this be the case, they will be offered options of support.	Low	
In addition, at the end of the interview the participant will be debriefed. They will be asked to reflect on the experience of the interview and their current emotional state. In the event that the interview brings up distress or upsetting feeling in the participants they will be offered the opportunity to discuss this with me straight after the interview. Should the feel the need to further explore this, they will be offered the option to have psychotherapy sessions at Aquamarin Clinic with an accredited psychotherapist. In the event of an urgent and immediate need for counselling support, the participants will be supplied with the local Direct support helpline telephone number and also offered the option of contacting Estuar Helpline, a free online psychotherapy and counselling service in Bucharest.	Low	
3. Ill health: whilst aging per se does not intrinsically make one vulnerable, there are undeniable aspects of aging that open participants to risk related to research (such as Physical changes, easy fatigability, shortness of breath, decreased mobility, chronic pain or illness, lack of support systems, and changes in cognitive ability) CONTROL: I will specifically about disabilities or support needed before the interview and establish on a case-by-case basis how I can best support each participant. However I am aware that these may not always be answered honestly due to embarrassment, or even lack of awareness that these deficits exist. I will check in with the clients whether they need to take a short break or they would like me to sit closer to them/speak louder – in case there is a hearing impairment. I will create a comfortable environment and make sure it is best adjusted to their needs.		

Signature of Field/location worker (Student/Staff)	Click here to enter text.	Date:	Click here to enter a date.
Signature of Student Supervisor	Click here to enter text.	Date:	Click here to enter a date.
APPROVAL: (ONE ONLY) Signature of Director of Programmes (undergraduate students only)	Click here to enter text.	Date:	Click here to enter a date.
Signature of Research Degree Co-ordinator or Director of Programmes (Postgraduate)	Click here to enter text.	Date:	Click here to enter a date.
Signature of Research Centre Head (for staff field/location workers)	Click here to enter text.	Date:	Click here to enter a date.

	With regards to physical limitations, I will ensure that a First Aid trained person (and a First Aid kit) is on the premises and support is on hand and easy to access, should the participant suffer from a medical condition that warrants immediate assistance. I will familiarise myself with the local medical assistance providers and make sure I have their phone numbers at hand, in the event of a medical issue. Potential Risk: Failure of equipment – breakdown of digital recorder. 4. CONTROL: I will take an additional recorder with me, in the event there is a problem with my primary recorder. I will carry extra new AAA batteries with me.		

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION AND SIGN AS APPROPRIATE

DECLARATION: The undersigned have assessed the activity and the associated risks and declare that there is no significant risk or that the risk will be controlled by the method(s) listed above/over. Those participating in the work have read the assessment and will put in place precautions/control measures identified.

NB: Risk should be constantly reassessed during the field/location work period and additional precautions taken or field/location work discontinued if the risk is seen to be unacceptable.

2.

3.   FIELD/LOCATION WORK CHECK LIST

1. Ensure that **all members** of the field party possess the following attributes (where relevant) at a level appropriate to the proposed activity and likely field conditions:

☑ Safety Knowledge & Training?	☑ Awareness of cultural, social & political differen
☑ Personal clothing & safety equipment?	☑ Suitability of field/location workers to proposed
☑ Physical & psychological fitness & disease immunity, protection & awareness?	

2. Have all the necessary arrangements been made and information/instruction gained, and have the relevant authorities been consulted or informed with regard to

☑ Visa, permits?	☑ Weather conditions, tide times and ranges?
☑ Legal access to sites and/or persons?	☑ Suitability of field/location workers to proposed
☑ Vaccinations and other health precaution:	☑ Safety equipment and protective clothing?
☑ Financial and insurance implications?	☑ Travel and accommodation arrangements?
☑ Health insurance arrangements?	☑ Arrival times after journeys?
☑ Civil unrest and terrorism?	☑ Emergency procedures?
☑ Crime risk?	☑ Transport use?
☑ Political or military sensitivity of the proposed topic, its method or location?	

Important information for retaining evidence of completed risk assessments:

Once the risk assessment is completed and approval gained the **supervisor** should retain this form and issue a copy of it to the field/location worker participating on the field course/work. In addition the **approver** must keep a copy of this risk assessment in an appropriate Health and Safety file.
RP/cc Sept 2010

Participant Information Sheet (PIS)

New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling

61-63 Fortune Green Road

London

NW6 1DR

Middlesex University

The Burroughs

London NW4 4BT

Dated:

Research title: ***An existential phenomenological exploration of the lived experience of freedom in former political prisoners of the Romanian Communist Gulag,*** a research project being carried out by Oana Barnett as a requirement for the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy (DcPysch) from NSPC and Middlesex University.

1.   Invitation:

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take your time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

2.   What is the purpose of the research?

This study is being carried out as part of my studies at NSPC Ltd and Middlesex University.

The aim of this study is to gain a better grasp of how people understand their freedom and generate knowledge of the resources that individuals draw upon in order to become resilient in the face of overwhelmingly distressing life circumstances (political detention/torture). This can best be done by talking to people such as yourselves who have recently had the experience of incarceration in one of the Romanian Communist labour camps in order to hear first-hand about your experiences.

3. Why have I been chosen?

You have had the experience of being in one of the many labour camps during the Communist Era. This research is seeking to hear about your experience of oppression and freedom, as well as how this experience has changed over time.

4. Do I have to take part?

No. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary (but would be greatly appreciated). You would be asked to talk to me about your experience of freedom or oppression over a stretch of time (before, during and after incarceration). Please consider whether you feel able to do this before you sign the consent form, as the questions may bring back feelings and memories about difficult issues you may have been confronted with. You may choose not to answer any question during the interview, which is also perfectly acceptable. If you decide to take part in this research, you may withdraw at any time before, during, or after the interviews without justifying your decision.

5. What will happen to me if I take part?

I would like to interview you on one occasion for about an hour. We will discuss how things were for you before you were incarcerated, what it was like for you in the labour camps and how you experienced your sense of freedom during that time. We will also explore how you made sense of your life post detention and how the carceral experience may have changed you and your understanding of freedom. There will be no right or wrong answers to the questions. All that is required are your particular feelings, opinions and thoughts about your experiences.

Interviews will take place in a private counselling room in Bucharest. If this location is not convenient for you, I will travel closer to you and can arrange for a similar room to meet. You will not be paid for participating; however, your travel expenses will be reimbursed.

6. What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

Some of the questions may bring back feelings for you that you might find difficult and feel you need to talk about. We can talk about this while we are still together (I am an accredited psychotherapist). Alternatively, you are very welcome to contact Aquamarine Clinic for some confidential advice (phone number: +40 724 222 522).

7. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Your answers will inform research that seeks to contribute to a better understanding of freedom restriction as it was experienced and lived by you as a representative of a specific subgroup in a particular socio-political context, and how incarceration impacted on your existence. With the growing incidence of political refugees to Europe escaping from organized violence, human rights violations and torture in many parts of the world, the need for psychological assistance in the recovery from oppression is well documented. Oral testimonies of lived experience constitute a fresh point of departure in understanding the phenomenon of freedom-restriction, bringing to the fore critical issues related to human rights, governance, and politics in Romania and not only, that would be of interest to scholars in a range of disciplines in the Humanities and beyond.

8. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Yes. Your taking part in this research will be kept confidential. All data collected will be stored, analysed and reported in compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998. You will have right of access to personal data collected about you as part of the research. Should you wish to do so, please make a request in writing to the address at the end of this information sheet. Your details and interview recordings will be allocated an alphanumeric code. A record of any personal details, such as name, date of birth, address and sensitive personal data, will be kept separately to protect your anonymity. When quotes from the interviews are used in the research thesis, any information which could identify you will be changed. If my research is published, I will make sure that neither your name nor other identifying details are used.

9. Recordings:

The interviews will be digitally recorded then immediately encrypted and kept in a secure place separate from your personal details. The supervisor may ask to see the data collected prior to anonymization but otherwise please be assured that there would be no other individuals involved who could request seeing the data until it has been anonymized. After the study has been completed and research findings published, the recording will be deleted. Should you wish for the recording of your interview to be erased at any time beforehand, this will be arranged (without question).

10. Consent:

You will be given a copy of this information sheet for your personal records, and if you agree to take part you will be asked to sign the attached consent form before the study begins. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You don't have to take part if you do not want to. If you decide to take part you may withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

11.   What will happen to the results of the research study?

The research will be published as part of a doctoral thesis and will be lodged in the University Library. Should you wish to read the final research you can request to receive a copy of the completed thesis or a brief summary. Should you agree to take part in the research, please indicate which, if any, of these you would like sent to you (you will be asked to confirm this at the end of the interview).

12.   Who has reviewed the study?

All proposals for research using human participants are reviewed by an Ethics Committee before they can proceed. The research has received approval from the joint Research Ethics Committee of the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the School of Psychology of Middlesex University. Should you have any complaints about the research you can contact the research supervisor (please find details below). The indemnification procedure of Middlesex University applies to the research.

13.   Expenses

Travel expenses for the day of the interview to be reimbursed.

Thank you for reading this information sheet.

Should you decide to take part, please contact me at info@oanabarnett.co.uk or telephone +44207 435 8067

If you have any concerns about the conduct of the study, you can contact my research supervisor:

Supervisor: **Professor Dr. Emmy Van Deurzen**

New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling (NSPC)

Existential Academy 61-63 Fortune Green Road London NW6 1DR

England, United Kingdom

NSPC telephone number: +44207 435 8067

NSPC email address: admin@nspc.org.uk

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in this research.

Appendix III

<div style="text-align: center">

Participant Consent Form

</div>

New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling
61-63 Fortune Green Road
London
NW6 1DR

Middlesex University
The Burroughs
London NW4 4BT

<div style="text-align: center">

Middlesex University School of Health and Education
Psychology Department
Written Informed Consent

</div>

Title of study and academic year: **Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy (DcPsych)** year 3
Researcher's name: **Oana Barnett**
Supervisor's name: **Dr. Emmy Van Deurzen** email: londonoffice@dilemmas.org

- I have understood the details of the research as explained to me by the researcher and confirm that I have consented to act as a participant.

- I have been given contact details for the researcher in the information sheet.

- I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, the data collected during the research will not be identifiable, and I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without any obligation to explain my reasons for doing so.

- I further understand that the data I provide may be used for analysis and subsequent publication, and I provide my consent that this may occur.

_____
Print name   Sign Name

date: _____

To the participant: Data may be inspected by the Chair of the Psychology Ethics panel and the Chair of the School of Health and Education Ethics committee of Middlesex University, if required by institutional audits about the correctness of procedures. Although this would happen in strict confidentiality, please tick here if you do not wish your data to be included in audits: _____

Appendix IV

Debriefing Sheet

New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling (NSPC)
Existential Academy 61-63 Fortune Green Road London NW6 1DR
England, United Kingdom
NSPC telephone number: +44207 435 8067
NSPC email address: admin@nspc.org.uk

Middlesex University
The Burroughs
London NW4 4BT

Research Title: *An existential phenomenological exploration of the lived experience of freedom in former political prisoners of the Romanian Communist Gulag*
Researcher: Oana Barnett   +40724222522
Academic Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Emmy Van Deurzen   +448455577753
email: londonoffice@dilemmas.org

Research Participation:
□ You were selected to take part in the interview as you were incarcerated in one of the labour camps of the Romanian Communist Regime and the research was focussed on exploring the experience of freedom and oppression before, during and after incarceration.
□ The researcher was interested in discovering how you experienced your sense of freedom before, during and after incarceration
□ The research focussed on how your experience of being incarcerated changed your understanding of freedom and how you make sense of your freedom after the detention period
□ The research will take a philosophical perspective on the experiences of freedom and oppression in former political prisoners of the Romanian Communist Regime

Thank you very much for participating in this research, your contribution is really valued. Please do contact me if you have any further questions or queries.

Further Resources:
The Romanian College of Psychologists   www.copsi.ro Stoian Militaru Street 71, Post Code 040713, Post Office 7, Bucharest
The Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile www.iiccr.ro 13-19 Alecu Russo Street, 5th Floor, ap.11, district 2, Bucharest Romania tel:0213167565
The National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism www.totalitarism.ro Arhitect Grigore Cerchez Street 16, Bucharest, postcode: 0011876, Tel: 0212306992

Appendix V

Ethical Approval

**NEW SCHOOL OF PSYCHOTHERAPY
AND COUNSELLING**

NSPC Limited
Existential Academy
61–63 Fortune Green Road
London   NW6 1DR

17 The Grange
Langton Green
Tunbridge Wells
TN3 0HR

2nd May 2017

Dear Oana

Re: Ethics Approval

We held an Ethics Board and the following decisions were made.

Ethics Approval

Your application was approved by Chair's Action.

Please note that it is a condition of this ethics approval that recruitment, interviewing, or other contact with research participants only takes place when you are enrolled in a research supervision module. Once approved, you will be eligible to enroll on Research Project Part 1.

Yours sincerely

Prof Digby Tantam Chair Ethics Committee NSPC

+44 (0)203 515 0223 // +44 (0)207 435 8067
office@nspc.org.uk   www.nspc.org.uk   @NSPCinfo

NSPC Limited. Registered in England and Wales, no.07239892.

200

CNA Example Extract for Ianis's Interview

Below I have included a section of the pilotee's transcript in order to demonstrate how the data was coded and analyzed. This particular segment was chosen as it includes some of the key themes and it can provide transparent evidence as to how Critical Narrative Analysis was applied. **Table 1** is an example of the initial coding of data on a line-by-line basis, whereas **Table 2** presents the second coding phase, in which the initial data was reduced and categorized, leading to the development of key themes.

Table 1. Example of initial coding phase

OB4: …I'd like us to focus on your unique experience – therefore there are no good and bad answers as such. I would like us to explore how you experienced freedom restriction, how you related to your freedom before, during and after incarceration. I would be also curious to know about what your experience is now that the Communist Regime doesn't exist anymore	
P4: Actually, it still does..	Communism as present reality
OB5: Does it?	
P5: yes, it does…not the Regime in itself but at least the mentality is still here. There is a lot of nostalgia out there, you know	Presence of a communist mentality Nostalgia for the Communist Regime
OB6: I would be very interested to know a bit more about this nostalgia that you are referring to	
P6: You know what's happening? The ones who didn't suffer are stuck with that memory that they had secure jobs and housing – nobody really knew what was happening at the time as it was not allowed to broadcast or publish things…nowadays it's no too dissimilar, they have this tacit understanding to keep things like the archives hidden from the masses – it's still a micro-dictatorship'	Some people didn't suffer Job and housing security under the Regime Secrecy and repression of free speech Silencing and legal reinforcement of oppressive practices in relation to free speech as a current reality The existence of a micro-dictatorship
OB7: A micro-dictatorship *pause*	

P7: Yes, that's right *nods*. As far as what had been before is concerned, you must know that ever since college it was in my make up to search for a kind of – how should I call it – total freedom. Because ever since the interwar era, the so called Carlist era, when the Carol II's royal ruling started, we entered a certain dictatorial circle ..	The search for total freedom is part of one's make-up

Beginning of dictatorship in the interwar era |
| OB8: I see *nods* | Delineation of an intellectual elite – generation '22 – as opposed to dictatorship: condemnation of the intellectual elite |
| P8:…*clears throat*…therefore the generation that followed, also called by some generation '22, of Nae Ionescu, but also the ones that belonged to the interwar intellectual elite like Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Vulcanescu and so others…we were on their side. There was a side which was condemned, condemned… like it is today, as allegedly having an exaggerated undertone…of an "extreme right". In reality later historians who looked into this phenomenon have stated that this political formation had nothing to do with fascism or Nazism but was rather a national earthly movement – so as I was saying ever since college I adhered to this semi-political movement, with certain ideals – we had a political creed, based on our faith mostly -as we were what one would call "religious". | Opposants as politically oriented towards the extreme right

Positioning of values as rooted in a national earthly movement

Semi-political movement
Political creed based on faith

Faith as a source of equilibrium
Faith as a source of values and communion
Faith as the absence of violence |
| OB9: I see – It sounds like this was important to you | |
| P9: Erm, indeed….because faith can give one a certain balance…it teaches you how to be kind, compassionate, how to be closer to others, to love one another…it does nothing with violence. So the period before I was arrested was a period when it crossed our minds that we could be arrested eventually – because in 1945 when the Regime was installed – certain movements started all over the country and we were open to taking part– what do I mean by that? I was already a student then , I graduated from college "Mircea cel Batran" in 44 – 73 years ago. I was used with old local denominations - the Boulevard called Queen Mary changed to Boulevard Lenin, Carol Boulevard changed to Lenin, to Stalin I mean. Brasov, which was the key city in Romania due to its positioning at the crux of the main regions (Transylvania, Bucovina, Oas) changed its name to Stalin. They started banning literature, Eminescu, Cezar Petrescu, Rebreanu, Octavian Goga – and we witnessed these turbulences first hand | Becoming aware of the possibility of arrest

Being aware of other national movements constructing self as 'open-minded'

Language used as a political weapon– replacing local royal denomination with Sovietized names

Positioning 'Stalin' at the core of the country

Censorship of literature , losing the freedom to chose what to read

Witnessing turbulences

Feeling uncertain about the country's debt to the Russians |
| OB10: *pause* so you experienced lots of changes and disruptions | Taking stock and being proactive

Opposing without violence |

P10: Yes, that's right…the Regime also started the SovRoms – joint Romanian-Soviet ventures which were draining the country's resources*shakes head* no one really knew how much debt we were in with the Russians…*pause* As a form of protest, we organized ourselves in student centres – Bucharest, Iasi, Timisoara and Cluj - and we constituted some sort of resistance points, no violence at all – we were just people without guns – just people who believed…and we manifested ourselves discreetly. No violence at all. Of course, the Communist Regime, which started here in 1945, the so called 'New Vision', the heirs of Marx and Engels, Lenin and Stalin, put hurdles in our way…as a student in Bucharest, I felt its effects quite deeply - if one wasn't a member of the Socialist Party they wouldn't get any bread in the canteen, you'd get polenta or a bit of bread…they made sure we were left on the outside of normality', marginalized	Taking action for one's beliefs The Regime putting obstacles in the way of students Being discriminated against and treated differently if you didn't adhere to the party's Credo Being left outside of normality
OB11: I see, so they gave you a different treatment based on your political views	Discriminating against the rich, academics and the bourgeois peasants
P11: Absolutely….it soon became generalized….the same thing happened to the army; the of springs of richer people, professors or more well to do peasants, they didn't join the old standard Romanian army like the rest of the population – they were made to wear grey overalls and they were given a shovel and a wheelbarrow to humiliate them – 'the discriminatory practices were so visible that our generation- the Shield Generation - had to take a stance, how could we not have reacted – the devaluing of our own values – spiritual values, material values – even history was turned upside down – Roller with his history was saying that our descent line was more Slavic than Romanic…anyways. So practically we didn't feel our freedom wholly anymore, the way we used to feel in our teenage years – and we manifested our right to reclaim what was taken from us. We were inclined like that, we were dreamers, romantics….we didn't care about prison or the possible consequences of that because we were already formed in the spirit of freedom. For me the arrest in 1948 was no surprise at all, I expected it	Being made to dress differently as a sign of exclusion Being humiliated for one's beliefs Taking a stance as a result of the devaluation of values The distortion of history to fit in with the Soviet uniformization Not having liberties but feeling free inside Freedom as an inclination and an attribute of dreamers, romantics Enduring/ postponing thinking about detention to another time in the future
OB12: Yes *nods*	Imprisonment as assumed and unexpected
P12: …and we weren't thinking of prison, actually we were but we thought to ourselves "we will deal with it somehow", therefore the fact that I was arrested in 1948 wasn't a novelty or a surprise..	Changing the legislation to attract new members; bribing people into joining
OB13: *nods*I see, so that didn't constitute a surprise for you, you expected it?	Not succumbing to collective pressures

P13: Yes, I was expecting it. Especially due to the fact that when Communism rooted itself here, in the years 40-44 they had about 1000 – 1,200 party members; however in 46, 47 they came up with new laws according to which if you became a Party Member they would give you oil, bread, potatoes – the "bribe" – I didn't care about this, I kept my minding my own business and continued on the line on faith and the historic earthy past within this cultural space. For 3 years, from 45 to 48 they formed an army of spies and they collected all the data about the opposants – they also arrested the former State Security members who had all the information about who belonged to the Liberal Party or the other parties – the problems were very visible, and on 15 mai 1948 the biggest manifestation happened in Unirii's Palace but also the largest arrests took place – over 10.000 people were arrested and placed in the country's prisons. But what they did to prevent strengthening this movement – they separated the social categories that rebelled and they turned Jilava Prison into a kind of central gateway for the other prisons – every condemnation that was made anywhere in the country had to go through Jilava, as well as the already condemned, and from there they were distributed according to each categories: the pupils were sent to Targusor, the students to Pitesti, the academics went to Aiud, the peasants went to Gherla, and the former politicians went to Sighetul Marmatiei	Continuation of one's path and adherence to one's values and culture

Living under scrutiny and being spied on by the State

Manifestation resulting in the largest number of arrests; Mass imprisonments

Separation of prisoners based on social categories

The instauration of a Prison Hub and the distribution of prisoners according to social categories |

In order to provide more clarity in regard to how the coding was made, I will be discussing this using the following example. The code search for 'total freedom as part of one's make-up" was arrived as based on the participant's statement that "As far as what had been before is concerned, you must know that ever since college it was in my make up to search for a kind of – how should I call it – total freedom". In this sentence the words "search' 'total freedom' and 'make up' were the main units of meaning that prompted me to code the data in the way I did. After the early coding stage, these were clustered into key categories which in turn constituted the basis for the extraction of key themes (see Table 2). The second stage in Langdridge's CNA also includes the analysis of narrative tone and function, as well as narrative identity. To illustrate the analytical process more clearly, each of these interpretative lenses have been assigned a color code, as per the table below.

Interpretative lenses:

 Tone

 Identity

 Function

 Drawing on wider cultural narratives

Table 2. Example of the second coding phase

	OB4: … I'd like us to focus on your unique experience – therefore there are no good and bad answers as such. I would like us to explore how you experienced freedom restriction, how you related to your freedom before, during and after incarceration. I would be also curious to know about what your experience is now that the Communist Regime doesn't exist anymore	
Sad/disappointed tone	P4: Actually, it still does..	Communism as present reality
	OB5: Does it?	
Ironic tone	P5: yes, it does…not the Regime in itself but at least the mentality is still here. There is a lot of nostalgia out there, you know	Nostalgia for the Communist Regime
	OB6: I would be very interested to know a bit more about this nostalgia that you are referring to	
-expressing disapproval towards people who compromised personal values for job security and a house – fundamental needs being met Criticizing the current political climate	P6: You know what's happening? The ones who didn't suffer are stuck with that memory that they had secure jobs and housing – nobody really knew what was happening at the time as it was not	Some people didn't suffer Sacrificing values/freedom of speech for material safety

	allowed to broadcast or publish things…nowadays it's no too dissimilar, they have this tacit understanding to keep things like the archives hidden from the masses – it's still a micro-dictatorship'	The presence of a micro-dictatorship
	OB7: A micro-dictatorship*pause*	
Optimistic tone	P7: Yes, that's right. As far as what had been before is concerned, you must know that ever since college it was in my make up to search for a kind of – how should I call it *pause*– total freedom. Because ever since the interwar era, the so called Carlist era, when the Carol II's royal ruling started, we entered a certain dictatorial circle ..	
Self as prone to search for total freedom		Total freedom as intrinsic. A quest for total freedom as an individual's direct response to oppression
	OB8: I see *nods*	
Wider cultural narrative of belonging to an intellectual elite	P8:…therefore the generation that followed, also called by some generation '22, of Nae Ionescu, but also the ones that belonged to the interwar intellectual elite like Mircea ELiade, Emil Cioran, Vulcanescu and so others…we were on their side. There was a side which was condemned, condemned… like it is today, as alledgedly having an exaggerated undertone…of an "extreme right". In reality later historians who looked into this phenomenon have stated that this political formation had nothing to do with fascism or Nazism but was rather a national earthly movement – so as I was saying ever since college I adhered to this semi-political movement, with certain ideals – we had a political creed, based on our faith mostly -as we were what one would call "religious".	
Cynical tone		- -
Identifying self as 'religious', belonging to a political movement that shared a common creed		Positioning of self as belonging to an intellectual elite – political creed based on earthly values/faith
	OB9:I see. It sounds like that was important to you	
-advocates faith as a source of balance, compassion and kindness	P9: because faith can give one a certain balance…it teaches you how to be kind, compassionate, how to be closer to others, to love	

-justifies his position	one another…it does nothing with violence. So the period before I was arrested was a period when it crossed our minds that we could be arrested eventually – because in 1945 when the Regime was installed – certain movements started all over the country and we were open to taking part – what do I mean by that? I was already a student then , I graduated from college "Mircea cel Batran" in 44 – 73 years ago. I was used with old local denominations - the Boulevard called Queen Mary changed to Boulevard Lenin, Carol Boulevard changed to Lenin, to Stalin I mean. Brasov, which was the key city in Romania due to its positioning at the crux of the main regions (Transylvania, Bucovina, Oas) changed its name to Stalin. They started banning literature, Eminescu, Cezar Petrescu, Rebreanu, Octavian Goga – and we witnessed these turbulences.	Faith as a source of strength
Faith as a means to be closer to others, to connect		
Self as open to taking part		
Wider socio-political narrative around the Sovietization of the country		
Criticism of the abusive measures thaken by 'they'		Language as power – the distortion on language
Colective self; self as witness		
	OB10: *pause* so you experienced lots of changes and disruptions	
Shift in tone – pessimistic	P10: Yes, that's right…the Regime also started the SovRoms – joint Romanian-Soviet ventures which were draining the country's resources*shakes head* no one really knew how much debt we were in with the Russians…*pause* As a form of protest, we organized ourselves in student centres – Bucharest, Iasi, Timisoara and Cluj - and we constituted some sort of resistance points, no violence at all – we were just people without guns – just people who believed…and we manifested ourselves discreetly…no violence at all. Of course, the Communist Regime, which started here in 1945, the so called 'New Vision', the heirs of Marx and Engels, Lenin and Stalin, put hurdles in our	Taking stock – standing up for one's values
Justification of political action and taking stock		
Self as discreet, non-violent; collective self		
Ironic tone		

Contextualization and criticism of the communist movement and the beginning of oppression	way…as a student in Bucharest, I felt its effects quite deeply - if one wasn't a member of the Socialist Party they wouldn't get any bread in the canteen, you'd get polenta or a bit of bread…they made sure we were left on the outside of normality', marginalized	Experiencing cohersion and discrimination Taking a stance as a result of the devaluation of values
Self and others as left outside the sphere of normality	OB11: I see, so they were making differences	- The distortion of history to fit in the Soviet uniformisation
Drawing on the wider socio-political narrative of totalitarianism and ideology	P11: Absolutely….it soon became generalized….the same thing happened to the army; the of springs of richer people, professors or more well to do peasants, they didn't join the old standard Romanian army like the rest of the population – they were made to wear grey overalls and they were given a shovel and a wheelbarrow to humiliate them –	External liberty as opposed to internal freedom
Advocates taking a stance on the face of the devaluation of values	'the discriminatory practices were so visible that our generation- the Shield Generation - had to take a stance, how could we not have reacted – the devaluing of our own values – spiritual values, material values – even history was turned upside down – Roller with his history was saying that our descent line was more Slavic than Romanic…anyways. So practically	Freedom as a romantic ideal Imprisonment as assumed Resisting the 'bribe' and sticking to own's values
Nostalgic tone	we didn't feel our freedom wholly anymore, the way we used to feel in our teenage years – and we manifested our right to reclaim what was taken from us. We were inclined like that, we were dreamers, romantics….we didn't	
Self (and others) as a dreamer, a romantic	care about prison or the possible consequences of that because we were already formed in the spirit of freedom. For me the arrest in 1948 was no surprise at all, I expected it	Spying and collecting data on opposants Biggest protest against Communist ideology
	OB12: Yes *nods*	
	P12: …and we weren't thinking of prison, actually we were but we thought to ourselves " we will deal with it somehow", therefore the fact that I was arrested in 1948 wasn't a novelty or a surprise..	Imprisonment and social distribution of prisoners
Calm, determined tone		

	OB13: *nods* I see, so that didn't constitute a surprise for you, you expected it?	
Self as owning choices; assumed living	P13: Yes, I was expecting it. Especially due to the fact that when Communism rooted itself here, in the years 40-44 they had about 1000 – 1,200 party members; however in 46, 47 they came up with new laws according to which if you became a Party Member they would give you oil, bread, potatoes – the "bribe" – I didn't care about this, I kept my minding my own business and continued on the line on faith and the historic earlthly past within this cultural space.	
Wider socio-political narrative presenting the expansion of Communist ideology, the distortion of the Law and the instauration of totalitarianism		
Expressing disapproval towards the ones who were bribed into becoming members		
Self as incorruptible committed to own values, faith and culture		
	For 3 years, from 45 to 48 they formed an army of spies and they collected all the data about the opposants – they also arrested the former State Security members who had all the information about who belonged to the Liberal Party or the other parties – the problems were very visible, and on 15 May 1948 the biggest manifestation happened in Unirii's Palace but also the largest arrests took place – over 10.000 people were arrested and placed in the country's prisons. But what they did to prevent strengthening this movement – they separated the social categories that rebelled and they turned Jilava Prison into a kind of central gateway for the other prisons – every condemnation that was made anywhere in the country had to go through Jilava, as well as the already condemned, and from there they were distributed according to each categories: the pupils were sent to Targusor, the students to Pitesti, the academics went to Aiud, the peasants went to Gherla, and the former politicians went to Sighetul Marmatiei	
Exposes the Regime's ideological modus operandi		

In Table 2, the initial codes have been further reduced and key codes started to emerge through the analytic process. The resulting codes had been further be refined and some of these were absorbed by more descriptive codes in the process of developing categories. The following stage involved identifying the overarching themes within the narratives, without losing a sense of the overall cohesive narrative (Langdridge, 2007)

Appendix VII

Full Interview Transcript

Detailed below is the full transcript from the first interview with 'Ianis'. As with the other participants in this research, his real identity has been protected.

I highlighted in bold within the transcript the questions which directly relate to the scripted interview schedule. However, as with all interviews conducted and reflective of semi-structured interviewing generally, where the participant appeared to be already addressing an area that I sought to address, minimal prompting was used. This was also applied where it was felt some further prompting was required to help contextualise or better explain a question for the participant. As a result, the order in which specific questions were asked in relation to the interview script may at times be different from the interview questions presented in Chapter 2.

Who	Transcript
OB1	*Introductions and introducing format etc* Are you feeling comfortable? Are you ready to make a start?
P1	Yes, I am thank you.
OB2	Good to hear that– I can see that you brought the Participant Information Sheet with you. Are there any questions that you might have about any of that before we start.
P2	No, no specific questions. I hope that my story and experience of it all will be helpful
OB3	I am sure it will and I am indeed very grateful that you agreed to take part in this research. So that's a summary of the purpose but please if you have any questions as we go through it, please don't hesitate to ask
P3	Ok, great
OB4	OK so just to reiterate the purpose of the research is that I am trying to explore the subjective experience of freedom in former political prisoners of the Romanian Communist Gulag. I'd like us to focus on your unique experience – therefore there are no good and bad answers as such. I would like us to explore how you experienced freedom restriction, how you related to your freedom before, during and after incarceration. I would be also curious to know about what your experience is now that the Communist Regime doesn't exist anymore
P4	Actually it still does…
OB5	Does it?
P5	Yes, it does…not the Regime in itself but at least the mentality is still there. There is a lot of nostalgia out there, you know
OB6	I would be very interested to know a bit more about this nostalgia that you are referring to
P6	You know what's happening? The ones who didn't suffer are stuck with that memory that they had secure jobs and housing – nobody really knew what was happening at the time as it was not allowed to broadcast or publish things…nowadays it's no too dissimilar, they have this tacit understanding to keep things like the archives hidden from the masses – it's still a micro-dictatorship'
OB7	A micro-dictatorship *pause*

P7	Yeah, that is right *nods* As far as what had been before is concerned, I must tell you that ever since college I felt that it was in my make-up to search for a kind of *pause* how should I call it? *pause*: total freedom. Because ever since the interwar era, the so called Carlist era, when the Carol II's royal dictatorship started, we entered a certain dictatorial circle
OB8	I see *nods*
P8	*clears throat* …therefore the generation that followed, also called by some generation '22, of Nae Ionescu, but also the ones that belonged to the interwar intellectual elite like Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Vulcanescu and so others…we were on their side. There was a side which was condemned, condemned… like it is today, as allegedly having an inflated 'extreme right' political undertone In reality, current historians who looked into this phenomenon have stated that this political formation had nothing to do with fascism or Nazism but was rather a national earthly movement *pause* so, as I was saying, ever since college I adhered to this semi-political movement, with certain ideals – we had a political creed, based on our faith mostly… we were what one would call 'religious'.
OB9	I see – it sounds like that was important to you.
P9	Erm..indeed….because faith can give you a certain balance…it teaches you how to be kind, compassionate, how to be closer to others, to love one another…it has nothing to do with violence. So the period before I was arrested was a period when it crossed our minds that we could be arrested eventually – because in 1945 when the Regime was installed – certain movements started all over the country and we were open to taking part– what do I mean by that? I was already a student then , I graduated from college "Mircea cel Batran" in 44 – 73 years ago. I was used with old local denominations - the Boulevard called Queen Mary changed to Boulevard Lenin, Carol Boulevard changed to Lenin, to Stalin I mean. Brasov, which was the key city in Romania due to its positioning at the crux of the main regions (Transylvania, Bucovina, Oas) changed its name to Stalin. They started banning literature, Eminescu, Cezar Petrescu, Rebreanu, Octavian Goga – and we witnessed these turbulences first hand
OB10	*pause* so you experienced lots of changes and disruptions
P10	Yes, that's right.. the Regime also started the SovRoms – joint Romanian-Soviet ventures which were draining the country's resources*shakes head* no one really knew how much debt we were in with the Russians…*pause* As a form of protest, we organized ourselves in student centers – Bucharest, Iasi, Timisoara and Cluj - and we constituted some sort of resistance points, no violence at all – we were just people without guns – just people who believed…and we manifested ourselves discreetly... no violence at all. Of course, the Communist Regime, which started here in 1945, the so called 'New Vision', the heirs of Marx and Engels, Lenin and Stalin, put hurdles in our way…as a student in Bucharest, I felt its effects quite deeply - if one wasn't a member of the Socialist Party they wouldn't get any bread in the canteen, you'd get polenta or a bit of bread…they made sure we were left on the outside of normality', marginalized
OB11	I see – so they gave you a different treatment based on your political views
P11	Absolutely…it soon became generalized….the same thing happened to the army; the of springs of richer people, professors or more well to do peasants, they didn't join the old standard Romanian army like the rest of the population – they were made to wear grey overalls and they were given a shovel and a wheelbarrow to humiliate them – 'the discriminatory practices were so visible that our generation- the Shield Generation - had to take a stance, how could we not have reacted – the devaluing of our own values – spiritual values, material values – even history was turned upside down – Roller with his history was saying that our descent line was more Slavic than Romanic…anyways. So practically we didn't feel our freedom wholly anymore, the way we used to feel in our teenage years – and we manifested our right to reclaim what was taken from us. We were inclined like that, we were dreamers, romantics….we didn't care about prison or the possible consequences of that because we were already formed in the spirit of freedom. For me the arrest in 1948 was no surprise at all, I expected it

OB12	*nods* yes
P12	and we weren't thinking of prison, actually we were but we thought to ourselves 'we will deal with it somehow', therefore the fact that I was arrested in 1948 wasn't a novelty or a surprise..
OB13	*nods* I see, so that didn't constitute a surprise for you, you expected it?
P13	Yes, I was expecting it. Especially due to the fact that when Communism rooted itself here, in the years 40-44 they had about 1000 – 1,200 party members; however in 46, 47 they came up with new laws according to which if you became a Party Member they would give you oil, bread, potatoes – the "bribe" – I didn't care about this, I kept my minding my own business and continued on the line on faith and the historic earthly past within this cultural space. For 3 years, from 45 to 48 they formed an army of spies and they collected all the data about the opposants – they also arrested the former State Security members who had all the information about who belonged to the Liberal Party or the other parties – the problems were very visible, and on 15 May 1948 the biggest manifestation happened in Unirii's Palace but also the largest arrests took place – over 10.000 people were arrested and placed in the country's prisons. But what they did to prevent strengthening this movement – they separated the social categories that rebelled and they turned Jilava Prison into a kind of central gateway for the other prisons – every condemnation that was made anywhere in the country had to go through Jilava, as well as the already condemned, and from there they were distributed according to each categories: the pupils were sent to Targusor, the students to Pitesti, the academics went to Aiud, the peasants went to Gherla, and the former politicians went to Sighetul Marmatiei
OB14	I see – so Jilava was a Hub prison
P14	Precisely – I am telling you this so you can have an overview of what was going on at the time and how the Regime worked. At a certain point as the prisons became full – for instance in Gherla one wing was dedicated to religious cults: Orthodox and Greek-Catholic – but as the prison became overpopulated they closed these and turned them into warehouses. There was a director back than called Lazarus, who had a different ethnicity than ours, who said " '*There is no need for God within amongst these people, they are lost – we will make sure to educate them, that is* *emphasizes* *re-educate* them' …So as prisons became overpopulated, they built the Canal, and then they came up with the labor camps – Salcia, Periprava, Luciu- Giorgeni – they were like bitter pearls along the Danube. If they needed 1000 people for labor at the Canal, they would talk against themselves and the Security would find innocent people at fault: you listened to the radio, you did this and that … and then they placed lots of informers amongst the people – and since we are speaking of "informers" – I had access to my file after the Revolution and when I took a look I was terrified by it…in my file there were 17 Security officers who were in charge of me – they made rapports on me, like three of them were terrain workers and the others were decision makers; for instance, I will given you only one example, I got 2 letters form a friend of mine … I was invited by a friend of mine who worked for UNO, an extraordinary man - to go and see the Football Championship in Spain he said to me "*Dear Gogule, I sent you 300 dollars and I am inviting you to come and see me*"…of course this letter fell in the hand of the Security and the rapport of the officer who followed me – Mr. Cazacu – who followed me for 24 years.
OB15	*pause* so that continued even after you were set free
P15	Certainly
OB16	And this was in 1982…
P16	yes, but he spied on me before '89 and after '89, too
OB17	Even after the revolution in 1989?
P17	Yeah. yes, that's right …after 89 as well. He said this in his report " *I firmly oppose the issuing of a passport for him as he is going to meet other reactionarie*s" , which I already expected…and I couldn't go abroad until '89. In 1990 I finally went to Spain and for the following 15 years I kept on travelling to Spain, Morocco, France, Portugal – my colleague

	and I travelled everywhere. He ran away from the country in 48. You see, part of our colleagues back then in '48 fled the country and became fulfilled professionally, and the rest of us who remained we took the route of imprisonment. It was 14 September 1948, we were 25 students from different university…and we knew we were followed by them…and one of us said…perhaps it's time for us to flee the country. As we will freer to fight from abroad…Is there anyone who opposes this? And I stood up and I said, *I won't go anywhere, I won't go because I never thought to leave my country and I have always wanted to spend my old days in the place where I was born…but I added– if you chose to go, perhaps it's a good thing as we shouldn't all rot in prison and that's likely …maybe abroad we can accomplish ourselves*….therefore out of the 25 of us, it was me who said "no" and also the leader of the Belle Arte department, Sergiu Nicolae…it was the two of us who stayed and later we would meet again in prison.
OB18	So out of 25 it was only the two of you who chose to stay in the country? And what was that like, staying behind?
P18	It felt like the only option for me at the time *pauses* not a lot to deliberate on…But the rest of us went abroad and accomplished themselves…Huber, my desk mate, became an accomplished university professor in America in Ohio… he received the most prestigious award that Germany offers, the Humbolt award
OB19	That's quite an achievement
P19	Yeah yeah..he was my clasmate…lots of bright minds fled the country...so this is how it was back then*pause* one of my friends called our generation the Shield Generation 1948
OB20	OK *pause* shield is a powerful word… why do you think that was?
P20	*clears throat* we had to face up some horrific things…in 1948, when the most arrests took place…and they sent all students to Pitesti, a new prison which they called a 'jewel' prison… we left Jilava, which was an underground prison full of mold, rats and utter misery and got sent to Pitesti - the state-of-the art prison, only 10 years old…reserved especially for students…and this is where I ended up …the same place where they implemented the famous experiment called re-education…or "the re-education through torture"; you might have heard of it as the "Pitesti experiment" or "Pitesti phenomenon" …the crude reality though was that this was no experiment, but the mere brutal massacre of Romanian students
OB21	A massacre…
P21	Indeed…*sighs* I often asked myself why they targeted us, the students? I reflected on this a lot and arrived to the conclusion that university students were a key element to eradicate as the social category that makes the link between generations… it was us and our value systems that they wanted to destroy. There we were about 800-900 students in the prison and for three whole years - from '49 till '5 -2 we were subjected to unimaginable tortures. The system applied a treatment of…*long pause* I don't assume that you read any books about Pitesti, did you?
OB22	I read the Pitesti Phenomenon
P22	Yes… Ierunca's book is very similar to that of Dumitru Bacu, whose work was published in England, Germany and France…Bacu was sentenced to 6 years of prison and I met him in Gherla Penitentiary after I left Pitesti
OB23	You met him in a different prison?
P23	Yes, When I left Pitesti with all the atrocities that I witnessed there, all the failings and the surrender to re-education, all the compromises …I didn't know how to tell other prisoners to keep any students at arms' length, as all the students who ended up in Gherla and the Canal had been turned into informers…they were "tongue-pullers"….
OB24	Can you say a bit more about this? Was that a consequence of the re-education process?

P24	*interrupts* ....we were urged to go and mix with others in order to detect all the enemies of the regime, particularly amongst the detainees – once they found these people out, they isolated them. They mostly sent them to Pitesti in order to be re-educated...that is where most of the crimes took place...some of us resisted, others committed suicide, others lost their minds...and most of them were killed; my make-up was different, though...I could not allow to be beaten up by a fellow prisoner ...when I first got there and I was told to ,confess' my sins, they took me into this huge room, room number 1, in which there must have been about 40 students...when I entered it I soon realised that something was not quite right...nobody said a word to me and there was a heaviness in the air...the prisoners looked swollen in the face, but others looked quite confident and relaxed – this was the so called Leading Committee, I was to find out later. They just observed at first, kept themselves to themselves…they left me for a day or two to figure me out
OB25	Were these the guards?
P25	No, that's the thing....they were prisoners themselves, student colleagues of ours
OB26	I see...so they were part of a Leading Committee?
P26	Yes, Yes, they were prisoners just like us...but had turned into torturers…they had been 're-educated' and embraced the new Marxist Vison fully *shakes head* ….after a day they came to me and asked if I agreed with the process of ,re-education' ...I was ready to provide an answer, since I was a Philosophy student ...I was well familiar with pedagogic readings, and started challenging Macarenko's principles...Makarenko had been a Soviet pedagogue who dealt with thieves, rapists and criminals....they might have been more easily re-educated through hard labour and beatings, but...we had firm beliefs and values, we had ideals ...I told them that it was virtually impossible for this to happen since we weren't aware of what we had done wrong and we didn't think that Communism as a system had a future....I didn't get the chance to finish my sentence...all of them jumped on me and beat me to the point of unconsciousness. This was naturally a heavy shock for me...The following day I found myself again amongst 40 detainees, all colleagues of mine, all students...and I couldn't believe what they had done to me...I felt embarrassed and humiliated....I thought to myself that they beat me up and I didn't even take a stance, I didn't say anything back...I made a fool of myself
OB27	so you expected them to engage with you in a respectful debate and allow you to make your point, unaware that these were prisoners that had been converted to the new ideology. In what way did you experience that?
P27	I felt betrayed...I looked around me and I had no clue that they knew what was going to happen to me...the whole ,re-education' phenomenon was of course a smokescreen, the beatings were horrendous and the torture strategies were diversified according to the prisoner's ability to fight back...I didn't want to fight back...I thought to myself ''This is pointless…I don't want to die here, the right to life is not my decision…I first have to ask God then my parents, why sacrifice…to become a hero? Heroism is meaningless under the circumstances…One can never be judged under abnormal circumstances. Any declaration that is taken under pressure cannot be classified as 'real'...temporary failings belong to someone who still has a creed and has yet to find the meaning of their lives' So I did some soul searching and I said: Ok, I accept. But when the chief re-educator Turcanu told me when I went to Gherla…he said to me, you are not going to go to the Canal, you are going to Gherla…if you come across prisoners that are not totally convinced, see what they are still holding back – if there are any other people out there who haven't been arrested, if they are still in possession of guns…to spot the whole arsenal of people who opposed the Regime

	The day we left Pitesti I was the only one who knew I was going to Gherla, all of them thought they were going to the Canal and they had better conditions there – I said "Don't be fooled, we are going to Gherla" and they asked me "How do you know?" and I said : Mr Turcanu told me, Mr Turcanu who was the boss
OB28	Just to clarify, was Turcanu a student himself?
P28	He was indeed
OB29	So all of them were students who they themselves had been subjected to the re-education process and turned into torturers
P29	Yes, and this is where the drama lies, ours and his alike…because not long after he killed himself…this was the big tragedy, for all the students that went through the so called re-education - they couldn't reprogram people who had solid principles…wipe away our psyche altogether - they couldn't trust their own people there and were trying to make us change our values…why on earth did they need 800 students to do that? They only wanted to discover what was left out there , what we didn't declare during the interrogations…this was what the whole thing was based on. They weren't interested in the rest of it – this whole process of re-education that lasted almost 3 years was nothing but a masquerade!
OB30	What was it like for you to come to that realization?
P30	An utter shock
OB31	Shock… *nods*
P31	Yeah…how could it not be? I remember one day I went back and I said to my colleagues: Brothers, everything we endured in Pitesti, our dead, our crazy, the ones who committed suicide…it was all a masquerade, a miserable theatrical play.
OB32	Can you say a bit more about that?
P32	Yeah…it was so painful to realised that everything we stood up, our entire existence…our reality were reduced to an absurd experiment
OB33	Would you say that somehow in Pitesti you expressed your freedom by not choosing like the others chose, to resist?
P33	Yes, categorically. I wanted to keep my freedom for the future… as I felt that somewhere at the end of the tunnel there must be something else. I didn't want to be a hero.
OB34	And so if I was to ask you how did you express your freedom, you would say….?'
P34	I'd say what I said to myself back then : I don't have the right to give away my life in here. It's not mine to give and I need to ask permission. My parents are waiting for me outside
OB35	Ok so in that sense freedom was honouring and valuing life and the relationships with your dear ones
P35	Exactly…so I asked myself: what am still fighting for? What is there to live for? And my answer was: for a cause that I don't consider lost, but that I am coerced to denigrate for now. I am denigrating it now. Saint Peter too denied being acquainted to Jesus not once, not twice, but three times
OB36	It is a powerful analogy
P36	Yeah…Saint Peter doubted. I too could not accept that I'd be beaten to death by my own colleagues …..under abnormal conditions one can never be judged. A confession that is taken under pressure cannot be classified as real. It can't be valid. When it comes to failings, one could argue that total complete failings are a characteristic of weak people. However provisional failings, including the betrayal of the principles that led to these failings in the first place, belong to people that still have a creed, the ones who find meaning in their existence
OB37	Can you say a bit more about complete failings and weak people? What do you mean by that?
P37	Lots of people back then embraced the new ideology for favours, money, a better house and protection from the Securitate – they sold their souls so to speak and betrayed their friends, families and spouses for personal gains…that to me was a complete abdication of humanity.

	I on the other hand never betrayed my creed and values in my heart of hearts – I never questioned that for a second
OB38	I see, so you had a strong sense of integrity?
P39	This is the principle that guided me back then. The irony was that after the re-education in Pitesti followed another re-education Aiud. I don't suppose you've heard of that?
OB39	Hmm …No I haven't
P39	A lot more devious and using different principles that in Pitesti… the beatings and the physical violence were absent here…it was more subtle, geared towards moral and psychological destruction. Everything was coordinated from above…they found in Mr Turcanu the man who would carry this out. A man who betrayed his political party and joined the Communist Party, confessing his whole biography to the Securitate
OB40	And he did this willingly, uncoerced?
P40	Absolutely- completely willingly. He was honest from this perspective. In Suceava there was this other guy called Bogdanovic, an opportunist from the USSR, who was meant to implement the Soviet model locally – this was orchestrated by General Nicolski. He conducted the whole process, the beatings the tortures and how to systematically carry this out. Interestingly, Turcanu was the one who killed Bogdanovic later in Pitesti. But in truth I think Turcanu started this re-education process thinking it was a viable solution, believing it was going to work. Never had he imagined that it would have become this atrocious machinery. The tortures…….. I'm telling you *big sigh* I cannot tell you the methods because they are horrific. If I allowed myself to talk about some of them…*long pause*…although I don't know if I can…the things they came up with… especially around Christmas and Easter… I would be degrading the very idea of a human being *shudders*
OB41	Degrading …could you tell me a bit more about that?
P41	*long pause* I'm afraid I cannot bring myself to tell you, I am finding this impossible. There are things that one can merely not talk about.
OB42	That is okay…I completely understand
P42	Some of the things that took place there were indescribable- when this Turcanu came from his committee in Suceava, he was placed in cell number 11 and I was at number 10. He got in touch with the director of the prison and he said to him that he would be enquiring into who the other prisoners were, their sentences and so on. He managed to identify the leaders of each anti-communist organisation……for instance in medicine there was a guy called Aristotel Popescu from Cluj….he gathered all these leaders and tortured them, knowing that the ones just under them would give in automatically. If you come to think of it, it is a very clever principle. I remember that there was a film in which the main character asked "how can you get rid of a group of people? Do you kill them all?" And the other character answered- 'If you want to get a pack of Wolves then you get the alpha wolf' (the leader). This is exactly what Turcanu did. From each student organisation he took the alpha wolf…a total of 140 men, and he turned them into persecutors. Criminals. The best of our people, our colleagues. I even wrote this in one of my articles about a doctor who was under the death penalty. He ended up being a torturer in Pitesti when he was later asked to prolong his punishment he said I don't deserve this, the things I've done in prison have completely stripped me of my human being status. Can we even begin to fathom what happened to this man's psyche?
OB43	It sounds like he exercised his freedom by choosing to stay, to die?
P43	Actually the lawyer who represented him managed to turn the death penalty into a life sentence but he did end up dying in prison - in Jilava, Cazingcu. A special unit for 16 people
OB44	**What was is that helped you cope with all the beatings and the humiliations you were subjected to in Pitesti, Aiud and Gherla? What do you think helped you?**
P44	To me the most important factor was the connection with the Divine...I thought to myself that Christ had suffered so much and ultimately overcame all pain and won...I wasn't

	comparing myself to Christ in anyway, I just held on to this principle...secondly, it was the love for my family and the desire to be reunited..
OB45	As a principle
P45	Yeah …and I also cared a lot about my family
OB46	You had a family at home?
P46	First and foremost, I cared about my family and sometimes it crossed my mind that I might be needed as a witness…and I didn't want to die in detention, because that was not the place I wanted to die in…and if I had to die somewhere it had to be on the other side of those walls, not killed by improvised enemies...by one of my own colleagues...that would have been miserable, there was no heroism in this'
OB47	I see…that was important to you
P47	I fondly remember a colleague at Uni that committed suicide. He was an exceptional man. I often think he would have been such a useful man in our society today…he had so much potential. He couldn't take it anymore…*covers face with his hands*
OB48	I cannot imagine how tough that must have been…
P48	This is what happened to good men in the communist prisons… Some of them were killed because they resisted and they didn't want to give in and betray their comrades ! I was faced with this scenario myself …they said that if I had told them the names of all the anti-communist members in my village then they wouldn't have arrested me for the second time. But I thought to myself if I give in everyone from Kogalniceanu they will ask me to go on stand at the Court trial. How would I be able to look all these people in the eye as their accuser? I didn't divulge their names but others did and in the year 1958 I was condemned to 21 years of prison because I didn't declare who I knew from the village. In reality I had nothing to do with the villagers. Whenever I used to come back from University, I would join the anti-communist meetings as a guest…but that was irrelevant .
OB49	Just to clarify, what kind of organisation was it? cultural or political?
P49	No, political. As I said to you before, my strong values and political beliefs cost me 21 years of carceral ordeals…however, after they released me the first time they sent me to a fixed address. I have always had a strong artistic streak; I loved music, poetry, philosophy…so I decided to start up a quire, which actually got us into the national finals. I became a conductor, I got many prizes.
OB50	So this happened between your two arrests?
P50	Yeah. Yes indeed it was. I then started an Armenian dance assembly, I became a playwright…I had a fantastic ascension, I met my wife…and then they arrested me again. I had told her that a second arrest was probable but she told me 'If it happens, I will find a way to bear it…and she did'
OB51	I see, you met her during that period…
P51	Yeah. *pause*
OB52	Can you please clarify the period of your first arrest and then the second?
P52	Sure, 1948-1953 and then 1958-64
OB53	Oh so you had 5 years in between the two detention periods?
P53	*sucks teeth*.Yes 4 and a half years. Yes *pause* and as I was saying, I got married and I told her straight I wanted her to be my wife…it felt as if she had been waiting for me. We'd never really talked about us but we recently discussed this. I never really knew how old she was and she didn't know how old I was either. We had no clue about each other but we became really close somehow. I was a conductor and she was in the choir but I told her one day that she shouldn't really be singing because she was tone deaf..
OL54	*laughing*

P54	And she told me an interesting story : her mum used to say to her when she was in college "make sure that you don't hang out with the any of the boys at school because they're no good - all the good boys are in prison, be a good girl! My wife still says that the words of her mum haunted her at the time, they had something prophetic in them. The second thing that marked her was that one day, on her way back from School, she saw my mum and my auntie on the porch and she overheard my mum saying to the other woman "when my Ianis comes back from prison, I want him to marry this girl" A third thing was that one night she put a dry basil plant under her pillow as the tradition says you'd dream of your future husband… she dreamt of an enclosure surrounded by barbed wire and in the middle there was a boy doing kick ups with a ball. That could have been me because I used to play for Tinta Bucuresti and I assumed that the enclosure symbolised my prison years – my carceral journey, and hers as well. So we were talking about this the other day, reminiscing and looking for hidden meanings. I warned her back then that it is very likely they will arrest me a second time. Her answer back was "it is too late now, I will find a way to cope…" and she did. She also coped with another disaster: our baby girl died in her arms…when she was only four! our exceptional girl…*wipes tears from eyes* everyone said that she was exceptional because I hadn't really known her. She was 10 months when I left her and had an amazing upbringing. Our girl cut her hand and my wife took her to the surgery to be given a tetanus jab however the nurse gave her the wrong injection and she dies in my wife's arms.
OB55	I am so sorry to hear that…that must have been really difficult
P55	Yeah, well yeah… and my wife talks to me about it more now, because we never talked about it at the time as I was in prison.. she used to stay all alone in the house and think of how we were once a family three and she was all by herself… I was in prison for 21 years and our girl was buried in the local cemetery
OB56	*sighs* So the girl was 10 months old when you were arrested for the second time, is that right?
P56	Yes. After 9 and a half years I received my first postal card and permission to write home. It's interesting because exactly on the day when our girl died, I had a dream…*pause* and you might find this strange to hear but I knew when I was released that the girl had died. I dreamt of my daughter surrounded by a myriad of angels…there lots of angels flying around and the sky was very clear…when all of a sudden two of them dropped down from their flight into our garden, took A. and left . A week after that dream, I was allowed to write a postal card and I asked for a picture of A. Nothing came back …The first parcel I received was 9 and a half years later
OB57	You only got your first parcel after 9 and a half years?
P57	Yes. They sent me a picture of my girl and a picture of my granddad. I wondered to myself… why did they send a picture of my granddad together with A's picture? I was very confused about this and spoke to one of my prison mates who reassured me "don't be silly, how old is the girl?" and I said she is probably ten. He told me "Look, if you finish your sentence she will be at University when you come out. But if we come out earlier, this December she might even be a student in your wife's class" I was still unsettle and kept on asking but why did the send my granddad's picture next to A's? and he said "stop believing in dreams. If we listened to our dreams, we would have been dead four times by now" I wanted to believe him but I was still doubtful. When I was freed the same haunting thought resurfaced …I met my wife in Constanta and didn't ask anything about it, I was too afraid. We got home and she said lets go to the cemetery, I have something to tell you. This was our big drama, besides the detention years.*pause* In short, this is what happened to us : I experienced re-education first in Pitesti and then in Aiud. Speaking of Aiud, I was listening to this programme on TV two days ago and they were talking about re-education amongst other things. When I was in Aiud, I stayed in the Cells 258 with Petre Tutea, Petre Pantea, Nae Cojocaru and Father Sofian.And I asked Petre Tutea " What hope is there left for us, Professor? And he replied "don't you worry, you might be surprised but this will end soon – they are being pressurised from the outside to free us". I didn't allow myself to hope back then, but what he said came

	true. So the other night when I was watching this TV channel called REALITATEA if I am not mistaken, they were saying that in 1961-62 there was a meeting in which Gheorghiu Dej, Maurer and others belonging to higher structures participated, and there was a report written by the USA according to which they asked for the political detainees to be freed…it looked bad in the West. In response to this they started this re-education In Aiud.
OB58	Was this in 1963?
P58	No it was the beginning of 1961, autumn. I had a very nice calligraphy and I was talented at painting and in Gherla they asked me to write banners and slogans. That is where I made the billboard of the prison and many other things. It was a way of evading for me from the misery of the prison. In Aiud also I was working hard and everything that was spoken by the political leaders of that time was written in a kind of big book and in one of the days (23rd August 1963) I remember this Major Sergeant who was 1m65cm tall and weighed 125KG, he was round as a ball but had an extraordinary kindness about him and anyway I left my slogans to dry out long live Stalin…or whoever it was, Stalin might have been dead by then… and all that and he said to me "Hey you Greek guy, you are really talented". He was calling me Greek because he knew I was conceived in Greece. "I'll tell you something…..remember this was on 23rd August 1963. I know you have a heavy sentence so I'll tell you something but don't tell anyone else that I told you". What is it Sergeant? I asked. "Listen carefully-do you know what 23rd August means?" Yes I do I replied and then he said " Listen carefully next year on 23rd August you will all be home" I made the sign of the Cross.. I still do that to this day…and I was terrified because remembered Pitesti and Gherla because if I was still in Pitesti or Gherla I would have had to grass him up and tell the leaders about what he said to me. What a miserable situation I was in. I also felt like I wanted to tell my comrades about it but I was scared. In spite of my fear, I did go and told them "listen up boys, by next year 23rd August we will all be free" I had a dream about it. I remember Gogu and Zelca telling me "shut up, Greek…I also dreamt that and it didn't come true". When I was freed in 1964 worked for Elasta with a poet called Cola and on 26th June 1964 I had to sign declaration that I wouldn't say to anyone about who I'd seen, where I've been or who I've spoken to …ironically, I was taken in by Major Sergeant Pop. This is what his name was, may his soul rest in peace. And he said to me "didn't I tell you Greek?" *smiles* and he was right. I was freed as he told me…you could find good people in prisons as well.
OB59	So you were freed *pause* **How did detention change your sense of personal freedom?**
P59	Do you know what prison did to me to be very precise? There is a Latin saying that goes "*Ouidquid agis, prudenter agas et respice finem*" meaning everything you do, do it wisely and think of the consequences. When I came out of Gherla I was suspicious of everyone. Whoever came to me always made me think twice
OB60	It make you more prudent, more cautious?
P60	Yes it stuck in my mind. In my 300 page long Securitate file some of the men in my village, many of them relatives of mine and people who I had helped professionally, they had given information about me and this made me avoid speaking about my detention years for a long time. Not to give them any of that satisfaction. Two of these men were from Constanta …I will not mention their names. I often think that I could make them aware that I know what they did… over a glass of whisky….they were colleagues of mine and it really hurt. But yeah…that was it for me. I rebuilt my life because I had to, after that tragedy with my daughter we went on to have two more kids C and N, who brought us a lot of joy
OB61	How many years after your release did you have your first child?

P61	So I was freed in 1964 and my boy was born in 1965 and C my girl was born 1967 …but I've always had a passion for culture and this has always given me meaning, the same one that I could have had if I had become a professor. That was always my dream, to be a professor. When I studied philosophy I was part of a group of academics and I thrived on that - Dimitrie Gusti, Antonesu, Mircea Florian and many others.
OB62	It sounds like being able to immerse yourself in education, culture, philosophy was very freeing for you, is that right?
P62	Definitely in my opinion talent - if I can use that word - has an immense influence on human beings. It can make people less ambivalent… although Dimitrie Gusti told me once that I can be ambivalent and "someone who wasn't born where they live or hasn't finished their School where they started will always show ambivalence throughout life" …and in fact, this is how I was. I was conceived in Greece and I was born in Romania. I started my School in Bazagic and finished it in Constanta. I started my detention in Jilava in Pitesti and I finished it in Aiud. It all felt like a whirlwind… „ In 1977 they suddenly turned up at my house and started bringing up stuff about our previous political organisation...I could quickly tell that one of them was an informer, so I made up an excuse that my mother needed me for an urgent matter; when I went back in I told them that one of my cousins passed on and I had to go to Mihai Viteazu – they handed me a piece of paper saying that I had to go to the Securitate headquarters. Once I got there they started scolding me that I didn't check in with them after I received this visit...There was a Major called Predeanu, who said to me : „Why is it that you don't want to help us?". And I remember I completely lost it with him: ‚Who do you want me to help, Colonel? My sister was imprisoned for ten years, my uncle died in prison, my other uncle died in prison, I lost my daughter, my wife is unwell...and so on...who can I help and how? He kept interrogating me for two hours and in the end he told me: 'Alright, from today onwards nobody is going to disturb you again? But of course they did...they kept on pestering me...sending me written warnings...I am still cautious about who I talk to, to this day. In 1996 I was told by a colonel from the Securitate that he could have arrested me on the spot. I allegedly hadn't declared that I had a visitor from UNO...I couldn't believe my ears! But they continued chasing me, they had 17 informers on my case... how could I feel free? I couldn't trust anyone
OB63	So his was in 1977, is that right? What was that like for you?
P63	Yes 1977. It took a long time, I received many warnings …what was that like? *pauses*It was scary but freeing. I had nothing to lose by that point…
OB64	**How do you experience your freedom nowadays 28 years after the fall of the communist regime? What does freedom mean to you now?**
P64	*pause* I will use a quote to answer that. I was reading this article the other day by a historian called Buzatu. He said that in the end our democracy is a kind of dictatorship too. I still don't have the freedom to speak up, I am reticent. In 1996 I was invited for a drink by a Colonel who was my informant for 20 years ..he is still alive… and do you know what he asked me? "Who used to come to your home in Ovidiu?" *scream pose* and I told him "If you are still that curious, couldn't you ask the other 17 informants that were on my case?"
OB65	*laughs* did you have the feeling that he was still gathering information and informing at the time?
P65	Yeah erm….then I asked him why did you have to do that? Ironically, he was also related to my son-in law, so I felt like I could take it a bit further. Do you know what he said to me? " did it because I wanted to protect you" …This was in 1996….shocking *clears throat...pause*
OB66	So the interrogations and pursuits continued even after 1989
P66	Hmm *nods* yeah …and they still continue

OB67	They still continue? Can you say a bit more?
P67	Erm.. Yes do you think that there aren't informers out there who are still collecting data and feeding back in which villages X is and what place Y is. It is ironic how you become "friends" with the ex-informants, like in the case of my son-in-law's relative. This Colonel gave me some details that were unbelievable to me from the archives… He told me that he had been monitoring me for 20 years. 20 years! *shakes head*
OB68	What was it like to come face-to-face with a man that has been monitoring you for 20 years?
P68	It was easier that I expected….I also met the guy that was my main informant, Mr Cazacu. One day we had to walk together from this event and he wanted to stop and get a drink. We were talking over a glass of wine and he said to me "Do you know that I can arrest you right now?" and I said to him "what are you talking about? What would you arrest me for?" and he said "Why didn't you declare that you had foreigners in your house?" What foreigners? " I asked. He was referring to a friend of mine from the United Nations who had come to visit …and I said yes it is true, he came to my house, he drank he ate he even gave me some money. What is your problem? "But why haven't you declared it?" and I said "Mr Cazacu, if you get me into trouble for this you'll be the one going down.. Stefanescu Eugen, my visitor at the time, had a letter from Ceusescu himself thanking him for the 5000 USD donation to support with the floods…so I wasn't doing anything shady. Despite telling him this, I was called by the Securitate and had to declare in writing what I have just said to you..
OB69	So there have been years and years of being monitored and harassed…
P69	Yes. I still don't feel free…There are times when I feel free when I am with my wife and we are reminiscing about our life together…as she didn't make sense of it back then. Poor soul, when we went to the Registry Office and I heard her date of birth 1933 I thought Gosh she's so young…*looks to ceiling* pause*
OB70	*smiles* So you didn't know how old she was before you got married..
P70	No, for us Aromanians age is not an issue...we seem to be more concerned with name days rather than birthdays.. Saint Helen, Said George…but anyway,I was saying about freedom…
OB71	You were saying that you feel like you are still not free…
P71	No, that freedom I have it in my soul, but the other kind of freedom, which is exterior – I don't feel that at all
OB72	Tell me a bit about that freedom that you have in your soul, how would you describe it? Where does it originate from?
P72	…it's hard …
OB73	I understand. It's hard to describe?
P73	It is a special feeling. I think all of us experience it differently.*pause*
OB74	But you are certain of having it…
P74	I definitely have it. Because I can express myself. And do you know when I experience it totally? Whenever I meet my former detention brothers, over a glass of wine or at different events ..I feel myself, I feel at home. Because the reason why prison was bearable for me was the fact that there were thousands of people…and all the burden and the sufferance seemed to be refracted on and shared by all of us. It was transfigured. And we coped a lot easier because there in prison we all looked alike …there were those stripes we were wearing that levelled all of us
OB75	Collective suffering?
P75	That is exactly it…collective suffering. *pause* *looks at the clock*
OB76	How you feeling?
P77	Fine thank you…I am grateful that you have given me to opportunity to talk about this
OB77	Thank you for taking part in this research – it means a lot to me

P77	Yeah, the only regret that I have now, what fills me with regret, is that we fought for a certain cause… a cause that has not been fulfilled. Do you understand what I mean?
OB78	Yes, I do. What is that like for you?
P78	It is disappointing, it hurts… One of my biggest sorrows is that we fought for a cause that hasn't been accomplished …we wanted it for the people of this nation, for their freedom…and I watch TV and see that they are stealing millions from the country and the whole system is based on the 'bribe'...and I change the channel to sports and try not to think about it, but it really hurts.
OB79	Right…corruption seems to be widespread
P79	Yes, it pains me. But it is what it is. I switch the TV channel to Sports, and I try to forget about it.
OB80	So, you are saying that it is very painful for you the fact that you fought so hard.
P80	Yeah. We all did – and it hurts to see it was in vain.
OB81	And that is because you are realising that not much has changed?
P81	Precisely…it hurts a lot. But it is what it is. If I had to do it all over again, I wouldn't change a thing
OB82	I thank you so much for accepting to share some of your thoughts and experiences with me. It has been extremely useful for my research to hear about your experiences. I'll stop recording and we can take a few moments to talk through how you're feeling...
P82	It has been my pleasure, thank you for having me